Planning the Next Great Migration

A Guide to Escaping America's Coming Climate Catastrophe



Lynn P. B. Hansen

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For R.F.

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While information on specific potential destinations was obtained from reputable sources, it may be out of date or contain errors. Please check the current accuracy of such information for any place you are interested in before making any major life decisions.

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Introduction

Industrial civilization is on the brink of a decline so severe that it may reasonably be called *collapse*. Dissident voices have been warning for decades of the risks of climate change and the unsustainability of an economic system that requires endless increases in consumption. They have been largely ignored, not only by the powers-that-be intent on making their next billion dollars, but by the general public. Most of us have felt we can't afford to focus too much on potential future problems. Most Americans know that, however isolating and stressful our lives might be, we are materially much better off than our grandparents, or people living in most of the world today. We don't like the idea of giving up those comforts, some of which we have come to think of as necessities, in the hope that that will do some little good for the future.

In recent years, more and more of the working classes are *not* better off than preceding generations. Treated by corporate employers as tools to be used up and thrown away, lacking meaningful or any union representation, they are barely scraping by, knowing that one crisis could leave them homeless. Still, many people in that position fiercely defend the status quo, understandably fearing that any attempt to change it might leave them even worse off.

Almost all of us are caught in consumption traps, too. Even if we know that the American car-centric culture is unsustainable and wrecking the climate, if we can't get hired or keep a job where we live without a car, we will keep paying for that car. Then we need the job to support the car, as well as the car to support the job. Climate change means we suffer more from the heat, so if we can afford it, we use air conditioning, which worsens climate change. We can't try to adopt older ways of living that could reduce our dependence on such machines, because they would interfere with our performance of

the corporate job that we need to pay our sky-high energy bills. And so forth.

There is a powerful inertia in any society. If what we are doing is allowing us to get by well enough, we want and expect to keep doing things that way for as long as possible, preferably forever. Making big changes means risk, sacrifices, discomfort, or conflict with others who like things the way they are. Who needs that? So we think we will only change if things really get bad enough to force us to.

The trouble is that when we see that we are being forced to change, it might be too late to avoid personal catastrophe. At best, the changes required will be much harder. If you only plan to give up soda and cigarettes and start walking if and when you actually have a heart attack, for example, then you run the risk that if you do, that first one will kill you. Even if it doesn't, you'll probably never achieve the level of health you might have enjoyed if you'd started doing those things twenty or even five years earlier.

There's a difference between the personal-health example and our current predicament, though. If a doctor threatens that you'll certainly have a heart attack if you don't change your lifestyle (or, more likely, if you don't go on pills for life), he's lying. The odds may be ugly, but some people always beat them and live happily to extreme old age, on the couch smoking cigarettes and swilling rum and Coke. But in the coming years, the unsustainability of our economic arrangements plus increasing climate change *will* disrupt the global economy and make life harder for people in the areas worst hit. Some specific places *will* be badly affected. It's effectively 100% certain that these things will happen.

In fact, they're already happening now. Last year, several hundred people were killed by an apocalyptic heat wave and firestorm in the Pacific Northwest, and hundreds more by flooding in areas of Europe and Asia that got a normal year's rainfall in a few days. We've assumed that even if the beautiful place we live in really will become a desert or a piece of seafloor, that would happen centuries from now, or at least several decades from now—so, not really our problem, right? Tough luck for the grandkids! But some areas may not have decades before their ability to maintain the infrastructure of

civilization is critically affected over large areas. They may only have a few years—if that.

Future crises may drive large numbers of people out of the most vulnerable areas. People might be forced to leave because a hurricane, wildfire, or flood destroys their neighborhood, and the resources to support victims and rebuild don't exist or aren't made available. New Orleans was never fully rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina. As more such events occur, governments and insurance companies will provide less assistance after each. People also might feel forced to move because of increasingly unreliable supplies of water or other utilities, or weather extremes that existing housing stock wasn't designed to help people survive, or just the loss of available employment as things fall apart.

These will be occasions of misery at best. Imagine moving yourself or your family to a distant state not because you want to or you've taken a great new job, but because the situation at home has become completely intolerable. Maybe you've lost everything you own in a flood or fire, or maybe you're moving in your car because you don't have enough savings to rent an apartment, so you know that at best you'll be living in a motel somewhere. And what if you don't have a car?

The history of forced migration even within the United States is not a pretty one. Many of us are aware of our hostile exclusion of today's foreign climate migrants and the camps they are herded into in European countries. Fewer know that when white American refugees from the manmade environmental disaster of the Dust Bowl entered California, they encountered not only monstrously exploitative employers, but semi-militarized police at the border and miserable refugee camps. We prefer not to remember that after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, white supremacist law officers in multiple places shot at, and even killed, African-American survivors trying to escape the flooded city across elevated bridges. People who are fleeing a disaster that has already happened, going wherever or as far as they can manage to go, without savings or a job or home at their destination, are incredibly vulnerable.

Today, Americans coming from coastal states are already demonized in certain circles. In harder times, the temptation to demonize and criminalize jobless and homeless people arriving from disliked states will be greater than ever, as impoverished outsiders would be seen as a drain on limited resources (or "our tax dollars"). Government does not do a great job of protecting Americans from hate crimes now. In future, it may have even less power to do so, or may not wish to try. Anything you can do to avoid becoming a refugee who would have to travel through communities and landscapes harboring many people who would hate you is to your benefit.

In this book, I propose that as many individuals as possible alter their life plans to enable them to take part in a managed retreat from certain clearly overpopulated and unsustainable areas. These include, especially, large urban areas in deserts, future deserts, and low-lying coastal areas, particularly those that lack sufficient regional ecosystem services to supply those cities' basic needs, or that face high risks of being overwhelmed by fire or flood. In the long run, as we will see, most of these areas are unsustainable in their present form. They *have* to decline in population or at least consumption, because it will be physically impossible for them to keep growing as they have been indefinitely. The younger you are now, the more likely it is that if you remain in one of those areas, you will face severely unpleasant or unlivable conditions in future.

Of course, if everyone could follow this advice and did so at once, it would create the feared state of mass unemployment and homelessness. The millions of residents of Las Vegas can't all pack up and move to La Crosse, say, or any other better-positioned city or town, at the same time. But that's not going to happen. The most that will plausibly happen as a result of efforts to create an early migratory movement is that a greater number of people begin, one by one, moving out of the areas of greatest risk. If they take my advice, they won't all move to the same place; a few more here and there in each of many destination communities, over a period of years, gives time for local housing and industry to adapt to the extra people.

Equally important, anyone now living in less-threatened areas who is thinking about moving to work or retire can choose *not* to move

into the more-threatened areas unless that is utterly essential for them to do the kind of work they want to do. (And then they might reasonably ask themselves, do they *really* want to work in that industry?) The huge urban areas in fire, drought, and flood zones are expanding not only by births, but because people keep moving there. If people stop moving there, the size and impact of future crises will be reduced a little—and, at least, anyone who doesn't move into those areas won't be affected by those crises.

These red-zone areas have been gaining population because they have been considered more desirable, usually for good reasons, such as high-paying jobs, diverse cultures, warm weather, and impressive scenery. However, I hope to persuade you that those criteria are no longer the best ones to use in choosing a home, and moreover, that your quality of life could be even better in a place currently perceived as less desirable.

The outline of this work is as follows. In Chapter 1, I will very briefly review the layers of cascading problems our country is facing. I will assume that you already are aware of and believe in climate change, so will not take the space to try to explain its causes and the evidence of its reality. Rather, I will only touch on the most important general predictions of its effects, and cite a few key references for those who are interested in seeing more detail.

Chapter 2 will address the political conditions in the United States. Though the electorate has been equally polarized in the past (*sometimes* without a civil war following), we see increasingly extreme polarization regarding the essential issue of whether government should be democratic or authoritarian, coupled with increases in hostile propaganda and even calls for mass murder. America is now a semi-democracy at significant risk of civil war. Chapter 3 will consider the possibility that the near-term breakup of the Union will result from these crises. Different regions of our huge continental state have always had different ecological, economic, and cultural characteristics, obscured by a veneer of television-driven corporate culture. As the fossil-fuel era declines and the mass long-distance travel and transport that keep the Union tied together become less affordable, the formal or effective breakup of the U.S. into several

smaller successor nations is a possible, perhaps even desirable consequence. I will suggest that migrants, especially younger people and those with children, should prioritize the likely future regional, but *not* local, political climate in selecting a home.

In Chapter 4, we will review the specific areas of the United States that are least sustainable and most overpopulated for the future. If you live in one of these most at-risk areas, you are strongly encouraged to consider moving to one of the more sustainable regions if you are able to do so.

In Chapters 5 and 6, we will explore how you can identify the region where you might best live, then use currently available free databases to find towns that might suit you. Since most of the people likely to be migrating in the near future will be urban residents, I hope to convince urbanites that for most Americans who are able to move, there are many possible destinations that would offer a better quality of life, if approached correctly, than an increasingly threatened and dysfunctional major city. We will consider economic, ecological, and political issues to identify, based on your preferences, the most promising region for you to live in. If each person moving to a given region chooses among the many potential destination towns and cities using personal or idiosyncratic criteria, the problem of excessive influx into a few places, causing worsened employment and housing situations and local resentment, will be minimized. I discuss some criteria for selecting preferred destinations, and explain why local political climate should be de-emphasized, though not discarded altogether.

Chapter 7 focuses on migration to the northeastern portion of the United States or states peripheral to the Northeast, where most proactive, voluntary climate migrants should probably prefer to go. I suggest some specific towns, cities, or regions in the most suitable states that would be worth considering as new homes, depending upon individual circumstances. Chapter 8 evaluates states in the Southeast, the best destination for those who prefer right-wing, religiously influenced government. Chapter 9 briefly considers a few intermediate states, for which, often, migration within the state may be more appropriate than migration to the state.

Chapter 10 briefly discusses housing and lifestyle issues. Once you identify a town you would like to move to, where would you live, in what kind of housing, and how secure would it be? While Americans usually think of housing and furnishings in terms of "how much can we afford?" a wiser attitude is "how little can we make do with?" The closer you can live to your likely employment and regular shopping or schools, the better. Avoidance of predictable flood zones and the ability to grow a little food will be desirable features for housing in future.

Chapter 11 acknowledges that many—or, more likely, most—Americans do not have enough savings to allow them to move safely. Some hardworking people simply have no hope in the near future of saving enough money for even the cheapest long-distance move. The best they can hope for may be that tightening labor markets, as others who can move do so, will improve their ability to demand a living wage. However, many Americans who have little savings do have enough income to generate savings if they are prepared to make sacrifices. I suggest selecting some sacrifices to make for a fixed period of time and seeing whether that allows you to achieve your goal.

Next, I offer some thoughts on other primarily economic aspects of planning for one's long-term future in a nation approaching serious decline. In Chapter 12, I consider employment and, especially, educational issues. If you are young and still in the stage of paying for your own job training (aka "getting an education"), you should presume that before the end of your working life, most people will have much less disposable income than they do today. Jobs that meet actual needs rather than servicing desires, and that cannot be outsourced to robots or desperate foreigners, are most likely to have long-term potential. If you are already employed but unsure how long your current work will remain feasible, think about developing another marketable skill. Joining the military, though far from risk-free, is recommended for the consideration of young people. The importance and challenges of the domestic economy, and the implications for family life, are also discussed.

Chapter 13 considers the situation of those who are retired or nearing retirement. After retiring, you might well want to move to a place that you expect will suffer fewer crises. Your choices should depend heavily on what you do and don't want to do—or have done to you—as you face inevitable physical decline and mortality. Most people who have children would be better off living near them, or if possible with them, but some would be better off living as far away as possible. You should approach this question with a hard look at your own philosophy of life and death and the trustworthiness of your nearest kin.

Chapter 14 addresses the importance of community in hard times, including ties to trusted friends or relatives, group forms of support such as churches and lodges, and connections to the broader community where you live. If you move to a place where you have no personal connections, you must make efforts to develop local relationships quickly. If you are moving to a community where there will be many people of another political faction, you should avoid making yourself a target. In this chapter I explain why you should help your friends and family to move where you do, but not too many of them, and why you should buy a gun and shoot your TV. Finally, for urbanites moving to small towns, I offer some general advice on avoiding a bad reputation.

I have set up a blog, next-migration.dreamwidth.org, at which I will be making available a modified and rearranged version of the text in this book. I hope that readers will join me there to comment, in particular, on the recommendations I have made for potentially suitable destinations in Eastern states. Perhaps you will have other places to recommend. If so, it would be a valuable contribution to this effort. The more diversity, the better. Please join me!

Chapter 1: The Certainty of Decline

Industrial civilization faces multiple levels of problems, from the specific to the general. Our single biggest specific problem is climate change, which we have caused, and which is already troublesome and getting worse. From a broader perspective, though, climate change is just one of the many ways in which a society built around the delusion of perpetual growth could shoot itself in the foot. Had the potential for climate change not existed, some other limit to growth would have presented itself. And from an even broader perspective, the collapse of civilizations is not novel. Some dozens of civilizations that we know of, though they did not pursue industrialization as we did, have built themselves up then fallen spectacularly. Is there something inherently unstable about our way of life, and if so, what can we do about it?

Tier 1: Climate catastrophe is upon us

We've been warned for decades that climate change would have harmful effects around the world. While many wallowed in denial, most of the rest of us comforted ourselves that the bad things would happen much later, decades or centuries from now, or somewhere else, in poorer nations. As I write this, with extreme-weather records being smashed almost weekly and hundreds of people dying as a result, anyone who is paying attention knows that climate change is *real*, it is happening *now*, and it's happening around the world, including right here.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides regular reports on the state of scientific understanding of climate change. These reports must be understood to be conservative. They are produced by large groups of experts, some representing governments that would really rather not admit that climate change exists at all. Wild

speculation cannot gain general agreement. Therefore, the IPCC reports frequently are criticized for not including discussions of possible mechanisms that could make future weather changes or sea level rise worse than predicted.

It is noteworthy, therefore, that the brand-new Summary for Policymakers of Working Group I of the Sixth Assessment Report (IPCC 2021), which deals with what is understood about the physical science involved, includes the following assessments:

- "It is unequivocal that ... [w]idespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere [ice] and biosphere have occurred."
- "Since 1750, increases in CO_2 (47%) and [methane] (156%) concentrations far exceed – and increases in [nitrous oxide] (23%) are similar to – the natural multi-millennial changes between glacial and interglacial periods over at least the past 800,000 years (*very high confidence*)."
- "It is *virtually certain* [99-100%] that hot extremes (including heatwaves) have become more frequent and more intense across most land regions since the 1950s ... Some recent hot extremes ... would have been *extremely unlikely* [<5% chance] to occur without human influence...."
- "Global mean sea level has risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in at least the last 3000 years (*high confidence*)."
- "Global warming of 2°C would *extremely likely* [>95% certainty] be exceeded in the intermediate GHG emissions scenario."
- "With every additional increment of global warming, changes in extremes continue to become larger.... There will be an increasing occurrence of some extreme events **unprecedented in the observational record** [emphasis added] with additional global warming, even at 1.5°C of global warming. Projected percentage changes in frequency are higher for rarer events (*high confidence*)."

- 10-year hot-temperature events now, at 1°C warming, *likely* [>66% certainty] occur 2.8 times more often than in 1850–1900 (range: 1.8–3.2 times) and are 1.2°C hotter. At 2°C, they would *likely* occur 5.6 times more often (range: 3.8–6.0); at 4°C they would *likely* occur 9.4 times more often (range: 8.3–9.6) and be 5.1°C hotter.
- 50-year hot-temperature events now *likely* occur 4.8 (2.3–6.4) times more often than in 1850–1900; at 2°C they would *likely* occur 13.9 (6.9–16.6) times more often, and at 4°C, 39.2 (27.0–41.4) times more often.
- "A warmer climate will intensify very wet and very dry weather and climate events and seasons, with implications for flooding and drought (*high confidence*)...."
- "It is *virtually certain* that global mean sea level will continue to rise over the 21st century.... In the longer term, sea level is committed to rise for centuries to millennia...."
- "Concurrent extremes [heatwaves coupled with droughts] at multiple locations, including in crop-producing areas, become more frequent at 2°C and above compared to 1.5°C global warming (*high confidence*)."
- "Achieving global net zero CO_2 emissions ... is a requirement for stabilizing CO_2-induced global surface temperature increase."

High-emissions, high-consumption scenarios would see the global climate system blowing far past 2°C or perhaps even 4°C before the end of the century. Fortunately, as we will see, there is some reason to hope [!] that industrial civilization will decline sharply before we can actually extract and burn enough fossil fuel for the worst-case scenarios to occur. But what we are certainly *not* doing is moving the world into a low-consumption scenario, in which we would quickly achieve net-zero carbon, then go below net-zero as carbon sinks uptake the excess. That would require that we enforce drastic, widespread reductions in fossil fuel extraction and burning, fossil-fueled industrial production, and personal consumption, long before depletion forces those reductions. At best, depending upon who is in

power, we send people to international meetings to make positive noises, but then we do very little to discourage carbon extraction or consumption.

Other countries producing high total emissions, such as China, are in the same boat. China has a large class of powerful high-consuming or factory-owning rich people who like the status quo, as we do, plus huge numbers of poor urbanites who can't be made to cut back much without triggering a revolution. Most wealthier European nations that have real social safety nets and public transportation have cut their carbon emissions far below ours. But they're still above the level that they need to be at. People in industrial nations like the creature comforts they've been raised with, and have come to think of them as just the way things are. Even in places where it's legal to live a life of bare-minimum consumption (probably not your town, if you're an American, especially with kids), most people can't imagine doing it, and simply won't do it voluntarily in case it might somehow help to save someone's life in Bangladesh (or Seattle!) twenty years from now. It just isn't happening.

Therefore we can make a prediction with "very high confidence" based on our experience of human nature: Climate change is going to get worse, probably a lot worse, before it gets better. And the new normal of "better," when oceanic currents, temperature, and rainfall have stabilized and the seas have stopped rising, is something nobody alive today, nor their children or grandchildren, will live to see.

So what does climate change mean for the United States? The IPCC report does not attempt to make locally detailed predictions. However, it notes that hot extremes have increased in western, northwestern, and northeastern North America, and drought in Western North America, and it is likely that both of those will worsen with every half a degree of temperature increase. The U.S. Global Change Research Program's (2018) *Climate Report* focused on attempts to model climate change impacts for individual regions of the U.S., also presenting data on changing climate indicators from the early fossil fuel era to recent years.

To begin with, nationally over the previous forty years, heat waves in the U.S. increased every decade. Average temperatures rose in most of the U.S., especially the West, although parts of the Southeast actually became slightly cooler. Sea ice declined, while sea level and ocean acidity rose. Snowpack sharply declined in most of the western U.S., and acres burned by wildfires, though highly variable year-on-year, increased. However, as of the early 2010s there had been no strong nationwide trend to increased drought severity. In the past two decades, heavy precipitation had become more common.

Predictions of this report were that temperatures ultimately would increase everywhere, while sea level rose, especially under high-emission scenarios. The number of hot and very hot days per year would increase across the country, perhaps dramatically if the average temperature increases were very high. Compared to the 1976–2005 average, the authors predicted that this might mean an extra 15 or so days over 110°F per year in Phoenix in the 2016–2045 period. In the 2036–2065 period, it might mean an extra 20 or 30 (or 45) very hot days per year, depending upon emissions. By the 2070–2099 period, the difference in emissions scenarios really kicks in. Though there was much uncertainty, there might be an extra 20 to 50 very hot days per year in the low scenario, vs. 45 to 90 days in the high scenario. Similar scenarios were shown for other cities, though the temperature qualifying as "very high" was usually much lower.

Nationally, coastal flooding and sea level rise were noted to be risks. As of 2013, 42% of the population lived in coastal counties, and about $1 trillion worth of real estate was to be found along the coastlines. At least another 2 feet or so of sea level rise was expected in this century, worse along the sinking coasts of Texas and Louisiana, or perhaps up to 6 feet in some places in a high-emissions scenario. Hurricanes are expected to have stronger winds and heavier rains in future, though they might become less frequent.

According to current trends and predictions, different regions will experience different water regimes. While the Southeast has had more heavy rain in recent years, the Southwest has seen droughts. Importantly, the area burned by wildfires in the western U.S. per year was estimated to be twice what it would have been without climate

change. Tree death in mid-elevation coniferous forests doubled since 1955, due to the direct effects of heat and drought as well as attacks by invasive bark beetles, which spread better in a warmer climate.

The Colorado River supplies water to millions of people in the Southwest, as well as to crops. Though there had been no decline in annual precipitation in the upper Colorado River basin, the temperature in that region had increased substantially (thus, the declining snowpack), the flow of the Colorado River showed a declining trend, and the water volume in the critical reservoirs of Lake Powell and Lake Mead had declined to historic lows. As we will see later, the condition of these reservoirs has gotten even worse since 2018.

Tier 2: The impossibility of infinite growth

In the early 1970s, a team of systems analysts funded by the Club of Rome created a computer model to project possible trajectories of world economic growth. Results were widely known as the Limits to Growth study. Three leading members of that team, Donella Meadows and colleagues, in 2004 published an update with additional analyses called *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update.* This book, which is not overly technical, is highly recommended reading for anyone who wants to understand the trap of globalized industrial capitalism.

The Limits to Growth analyses were inspired by the observation that human population had skyrocketed through exponential growth in the industrial era, and especially the fossil fuel era. (The population problem has worsened by billions since the original study.) Industrial production, fossil fuel consumption, and added carbon dioxide in the atmosphere all showed similar patterns of initially gentle increases that escalated rapidly. Our governments and financial industries became so used to seeing constant economic growth in the fossil fuel era that many nations created economic arrangements in which the stable functioning of the economy *requires* constant growth, and if growth stopped, parts of the financial system would jam up severely.

But infinite growth isn’t possible. A widely repeated quotation, attributed to economist Kenneth Boulding but apparently of uncertain

origin, says: "Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist." Conservative economist Herb Stein made a similar point: "If something cannot go on forever, it will stop" (Samuelson 2013). There must be limits. The purpose of the Limits to Growth study was to explore what those limits might be and how they might interact with our current trajectory of growth. It did this by creating a computer model of the world economy, called World3, which represented the world as a collection of basic stocks and feedback loops.

Stocks were such basic categories as population, nonrenewable resources, cultivated land, industrial capital, service capital, and pollution. Positive and negative feedback loops showed the relationships between these categories. For example, if more industrial capital is directed toward the goal of improving agricultural yields, food produced will increase; more food per capita can lead to reduced mortality, which leads to higher populations; if population increases, food per capita decreases.

These categories are obviously oversimplified, e.g., treating oil and iron ore as all one thing, "resources", and a range of estimates of the strength of feedback relationships would be possible. Meadows and colleagues were therefore careful not to claim that the speed and magnitude of change over time in runs of the model predicted what would happen in the real world. Still, that simplicity makes the general patterns shown by the model hard to ignore. We might dispute how strong the relationship between health services and life expectancy is, or how badly certain levels of pollution would affect agricultural yields, but we wouldn't argue with a straight face that health services have no effect on health or that any amount of pollution whatsoever would be harmless.

The model's output showed graphs of stocks and measures of economic and human welfare over time, beginning in 1900 and ending in 2100. The model's baseline Scenario 1 used numbers that the authors, in 1972, considered reasonable for the stocks and relationships among them. Results of Scenario 1 depicted industrial output continuing to increase until about 2020, when it first leveled out, then began to decline. At that point, the highest-quality nonrenewable res-

ources had been used up. More capital had to be put into extracting lower-quality resources, making less available for other functions like supporting agricultural and industrial growth and maintaining industrial capital, and it became impossible to keep extracting more resources every year. The result was that by 2050 industrial output was little higher than in 1950, and in 2100 it was little higher than in 1900. Agricultural productivity followed a similar but somewhat shallower curve, and pollution followed a lagging curve that peaked years after output. Population also peaked in the 2030s then declined, but much less dramatically than production, which meant that life expectancy and food, services, and consumer goods *per person* all declined dramatically. The average human welfare index at the end of the 21st century was lower than it had been in 1900.

We are now past 2020 and we *are* reaching a point where more and more resources need to be put into resource extraction, e.g., getting fossil fuels via fracking and mountaintop removal rather than the easier, cheaper drilling and mining of olden days. However, setting aside widespread pandemic-induced shutdowns, industrial output has not yet obviously or definitively peaked. There have been waves of unusual shortages and bottlenecks in the global economy, but so far those are still being attributed to the disruption of the pandemic. Therefore, we may suspect that Scenario 1's estimate of available resources was too stingy. To address the question of what would happen if the world's supply of resources was more generous, the next scenario that Meadows et al. explored doubled the starting amount.

In the high-resource Scenario 2, rather than facing a resource crisis, the simulated world of World3 faced a pollution crisis. Industrial output and population kept climbing until the 2040s. (Population was predicted to peak at 8 billion in 2040; in real life we are already at 7.8 billion, having well exceeded the Scenario 1 prediction.) But the consequence of the continued ability to extract and pollute was that pollution, produced in amounts greater than the Earth could absorb, built up to a far greater level, peaking around 2090 at five times the Scenario 1 peak. Higher pollution reduced land fertility, and as more resources were put into struggling to maintain

food production, industrial output declined. Food per person and life expectancy plummeted in the mid-21st century, with a slight rebound thereafter; the human welfare index declined; and the human ecological footprint peaked in 2050 at a level gigantically higher than that of 2000.

The Limits to Growth team did not try to predict exactly what the effects of pollution would be. It could be, Meadows et al. (2004) wrote, "through soil contamination by heavy metals or persistent chemicals, through climate change altering growth patterns faster than farmers can adapt, or through increased ultraviolet radiation from a diminished ozone layer." The general principle is that if we dump harmful things into the environment faster than it can cope with them, we *must* someday find that the fruitfulness of that environment is harmed. Though it is not relevant to the subject of this book, we must also end up eating, drinking, and breathing those things (e.g., Zhang et al. 2021). One might speak of the probable contributions of industrial chemicals to rapid increases in obesity and some cancers, early-onset dementia, declining sperm counts, and reduced cognitive function in children: toxicity that impairs our health and diverts resources towards medical care must reduce productivity in other sectors of the economy.

So here is where climate change, our Tier 1 catastrophe, becomes just a special case of the underlying fact that exponential growth in consumption and pollution must, somehow, someday, run into a limiting feedback loop. Burning more oil and coal means more droughts and heat waves, less irrigation water available from shrinking reservoirs or vanishing glaciers, less fodder for grazing animals in desertifying areas, and in wetter areas, more unexpectedly flooded farmlands. All of these things can lead to reduced agricultural yields, in the U.S. and globally, to say nothing of their direct impacts on human health. Likewise, resources put into rebuilding homes and businesses after hurricanes or creating huge water projects to maintain supplies for cities in drying areas will be resources that can't be used to maintain other infrastructure or other forms of capital.

You might query Scenario 2 as well. Perhaps Meadows et al. underestimated our ability to avoid the consequences of both

depletion and pollution. The team created further scenarios to look for one that would avoid an ugly decline in human welfare. Resources could be invested in ever-improving anti-pollution technologies, then technologies to increase agricultural yields faster, then erosion protection to keep the yield improvements from destroying the farmland faster. In each scenario, at some point the costs of business as usual became too high to sustain, and declines became inevitable, though less extreme than in Scenario 2. The reason is the phenomenon of overshoot and collapse: if the level of consumption is allowed temporarily to rise above what can possibly be sustained long-term, then at some point it *must* fall.

In Scenario 6, investments in efficiency were added to all the others. This allowed population to level off rather than collapsing, though goods and services per person declined. You might also ask, what about population control? A scenario in which the world agreed en masse to limit fertility to 2 children per woman, starting in 2002, did virtually nothing to change the catastrophic Scenario 2; nor did a global choice to freeze industrial output per person make much difference. The only scenario Meadows and colleagues found that allowed a comfortable leveling out of population, life expectancy, food, goods, and services per capita, and human welfare, with no declines, required the combination of global agreement to pursue stable population and industrial output per person, *plus* widespread application of all of the footprint-reducing technologies.

Obviously, that didn't happen in 2002. What are the chances that it will happen in the near future, when it might still make some difference? Effectively zero, it seems. Therefore, the very likely pattern of the coming century will be one of some kind of overshoot and decline, made inevitable by our species' excessive numbers and consumption. Again, the exact trajectories depicted by the Limits to Growth team's models are not to be taken as predictions. If we appear to be heading into something like Scenario 2, we shouldn't imagine that we know exactly when the population peak or agricultural output peak will be, or how severe the fall will be afterwards. Those will depend on a thousand factors that broad general models couldn't begin to incorporate.

What we should be convinced of is that the pattern of the world's economy over the past two centuries, continuing to get bigger and bigger every year while global corporations do as little as possible to clean up their own messes and a few naysayers grumble about the harms of pollution or the mass extinction of species on despoiled lands, *can't* continue unabated for another century. Decline is unavoidable.

Tier 3: The fate of complex civilizations

If you're like most Americans, you might find it hard to imagine that our civilization could face a really hard fall. This is outside modern experience. Most of us may only have heard of a couple of "collapsed civilizations," the Romans and the Mayans, and those were all safely long ago and "somewhere else." But there have been some dozens of complex societies that we know of, which left ruins around the world showing evidence of concentrated populations, surplus agricultural productivity, centrally directed labor, and specialized building skills, from Africa, Europe, and Asia to North America and the Amazon jungle. Many of the more recent civilizations left written records or the equivalent, some still undeciphered. We likely underestimate their number, perhaps greatly, because the remains of complex societies in areas that are now underwater or covered by dense rainforest are hard to find, and most of their cultural products have been destroyed.

From modest-sized Mediterranean Bronze Age states to empires spanning much of a continent, the common historical pattern for successful civilizations is one of growth, prosperity (usually amassed by robbing and/or enslaving their neighbors), and then decline, sometimes uneven, often catastrophic. While China has managed to rise, fall, then rise again repeatedly for millennia, far more—Harappa, Meroe, Rome, the Minoans, the Mayans, the Mississippians, and on and on—collapsed and never rebounded. Sophisticated cultures often re-emerged in the same regions, but they were different cultures. Declines in population and power had been so severe that much of the first culture's ways of life had been abandoned or irrevocably lost. After the Roman empire fell, though many of its subjects at the

time might have been happy to get the dysfunctional imperial boot off their necks (Jones and Ereira 2006), most of its culture, from sophisticated medicine to music and literature, was lost.

This phenomenon has of course been of interest to many historians over the centuries. It is such a universal pattern that early historians, like the pioneering 14th-century historian Ibn Khaldun and the 18th-century Giambattista Vico, formulated cyclical theories of history, seeing growth as inevitably followed by mismanagement or conflict and decay, so that regimes could be said to have a life cycle including old age and death just as people do. More recent European historians, perhaps expressing their own cultural anxieties, blamed some form of "decadence" for loss of power. Others have explained individual states' collapse as resulting from resource scarcity, ecological change, barbarian invasion, or internal conflict.

Joseph Tainter, in *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (1988), concisely summarizes the views of dozens of historians over several centuries. It must be said that Tainter himself takes not just a scientific view of history but a scientistic view, which defines explanations that do not offer explicit, currently testable "causal mechanisms" as inherently unworthy of consideration. Mystical explanations that presuppose a natural life cycle, whose "controlling mechanisms" are unimaginable by 20th-century reductionist science, are not just "indefensible" but "necessarily incorrect" [!]. The "elite mismanagement argument," Tainter says, may be "confidently dismiss[ed] ... as unproductive" since elite neglect of the working class would be contrary to elites' "elementary self-interest," even though he admits that it may indeed have contributed to the fall of the late Roman empire. "Until some theory is developed" to explain *why* Roman elites did not behave in accordance with their self-interest, offering their irrational behavior as an explanation for Rome's collapse is "not illuminating" in Tainter's view—even if it is factually true!

That said, Tainter proposes a general theory of collapse that, while certainly neither sufficient nor necessary to explain all collapses, may be relevant to many of them. When a large state society is developed from what were previously independent farming villages, say, the

amount of complexity increases greatly. More levels of bureaucracy must be supported to manage a large state than a small community (or, at least, generally *are* supported; Graeber and Wengrow [2021] in their superb new book *The Dawn of Everything* amass evidence that this may not have been universally true in the past). The rulers must either provide benefits to the people to maintain legitimacy for their rule, or hire thugs to keep the people cowed into paying taxes or doing labor. There are more different social and economic roles, and more types of goods and services produced, in a complex society. Infrastructure such as roads or irrigation systems, once built, must be maintained indefinitely or be lost. All these aspects of complexity have costs.

Tainter's crucial insight is that increasing complexity has diminishing marginal returns. The first investments in a particular field of activity will have small results. As methods improve or more people are affected, future investments of the same size at first make a bigger impact, but as time goes by, further equal investments start to have diminishing benefits. Tainter gives the examples from our own civilization of education (early childhood education costs less than college education but is more essential to our welfare) and science (questions that can be answered cheaply got answered first, so the questions now being explored are those that require more money). You could think of examples from the amount of electric lighting in your home to the amount of paved streets we have. At some point, adding another unit of *more*, while it costs just as much, wouldn't have much real benefit.

At some point beyond that, adding more could actually be detrimental. State societies try to solve problems by adding layers of complexity (build more infrastructure, hire more bureaucrats, conquer another province or two). Rome, for example, had very profitable early conquests, allowing "the homeland" to prosper. As the imperial borders moved farther outward, conquests became more expensive and the victims poorer, so the net profit to the empire was smaller. Eventually, they were spending more on conquest than they got out of it. They had reached the point of negative net benefits. (Our own empire recently spent trillions of dollars on a war of choice

in Iraq, originally planned to obtain control over that nation's oil revenues. Have we—even defining Halliburton executives as "we"—made trillions of dollars from that war? No.)

When a society reaches a level of complexity it can ill afford to support, a variety of problems will appear. If the ruling elites deal with those problems by the usual pattern of adding more complexity, the costs will increase even further and be even harder to pay, creating yet more problems. If crises, which someday will occur, must be paid for from the already stressed general operating budget, it will become increasingly necessary to let something slide. If that's infrastructure maintenance, the infrastructure will start to decay. If it's the benefits or public services that have maintained the government's legitimacy and the citizenry's loyalty, those will start to decay. Substituting more aggressive policing costs money too, and, like benefits, has diminishing marginal returns.

When the last layers of complexity added have had a negative net benefit, the same level of overall benefits, or quality of life, could be obtainable at a lower level of complexity, making collapse seem attractive. At some point, "collapsing" back to a much less complex society is not only unavoidable but, Tainter suggests, beneficial, getting those layers of useless management and unsustainable infrastructure off the backs of the peasantry so they can support themselves. (The fact that collapses often involve 90% population declines suggests that they're not so good for the generations who experience them, which Tainter nods to but doesn't emphasize.)

Tainter considers the possibility of economically driven collapse for our culture. Declining marginal returns are seen in important aspects of our economy, including resource extraction, agriculture, education, health, research, and management of industry and government. Yet our society was and is still growing, or "improving" from the view of a pro-growther, in all these areas. The point is not that we have stopped increasing agricultural yields or creating new inventions, but that each unit of "progress" in those areas costs more than it used to. Tainter regards these as red flags. "Although collapse is an economic adjustment," he remarks, "it can nevertheless be devastating where much of the population does not have the opportunity or

the ability to produce primary food resources"—as is the case in all urbanized societies.

Historically, Tainter notes, full-scale collapse could only happen in a power vacuum: in societies that dominated their geographic areas, without any neighboring states of similar power and complexity on their borders. In a region of competing states of similar power, such as Europe in recent centuries, if one government fell apart, its nation would rapidly be invaded, conquered, and its land and surviving people absorbed into the neighboring state. In that circumstance, because military power is proportional to complexity, maintenance of complexity becomes an essential state need no matter how crushing its costs are.

Because almost the entire planet is now densely populated by state societies, Tainter argues, collapse is no longer possible. A state that can't maintain the burdens of complexity would *have* to be absorbed by another or become the vassal of a greater power (including the IMF) to obtain support. This may not always be true—if the land is poor in resources and its people feisty enough, its neighbors may not feel like taking on the challenge of conquering a failed state—but it also leaves open the possibility of multiple powers collapsing simultaneously, perhaps hastened by the costs of their military competition, as Tainter suggests the Mayan States did. Late-stage industrial capitalism represents the first global civilization. Every powerful nation depends on global supply chains and nonrenewable resource extraction; all will face climate change almost simultaneously, though not all with equal severity. All may decline together. Is it possible that all might collapse together?

The problem of complexification

As noted in Tainter's analyses, there's a rough relationship between the amount of energy available per capita and the amount of complexity in a society (White 1949). When people are living at a bare subsistence level of foraging or farming using manual labor, few other social roles or specialist labor can be supported. Access to other supplies of energy enables more productivity per unit of labor, both in agriculture and in other important fields, so that some of the pop-

ulation can (and often must) find other things to do. Further energy surplus allows the employment of more people in roles that aren't directly involved in producing desired goods and services, such as middle management, or that simply consume them, such as government spies in regimes that use repression to gain obedience.

In the late fossil fuel era, we have and consume far more energy per capita than any past civilization that ever existed. Correspondingly, while other civilizations certainly had skilled professionals, artisans, artists, soldiers, bureaucrats, and so on, we have greater socioeconomic complexity than has ever existed before. We have been taught to think of that as a benefit, as a way in which we are superior to past cultures. However, as Tainter pointed out, that complexity has costs. Moreover, if—or when—energy supplies decline too much, the costs of maintaining some aspects of complexity would increase, but their benefits would not, potentially dropping their *net* benefit below zero. Is America near the point where complexification is doing us more harm than good? Let's consider a couple of examples.

Complexification of the economy adds layers of management and bureaucracy to formerly simple transactions. At best, these make transactions more efficient or safer, but at worst, they make them more expensive and difficult. Here is a small but painful example. As reported by *The Guardian* (Eubanks and Mateescu 2021), federal law now demands that home health workers paid by Medicaid document their activities not with paper timesheets, but with Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) smartphone apps that track the workers' locations. Caregivers must purchase a cellphone, therefore, and use it to clock in regularly, sometimes interrupting actual care, to be paid.

The state of Arkansas chose to apply this to live-in family caregivers, whose "clients" must provide time-consuming daily approvals, and to implement "geofencing." If the caregiver's phone is ever too far from the client's house, the state may accuse the caregiver of filing a false report and delay or withhold their paycheck, with devastating consequences for low-wage workers. Disabled people complained that this creates a norm that they will be homebound, making them afraid to leave the house lest their care-

giver not be paid. It also means that whenever they do leave the house with their EVV-tracked caregiver, *their* movements are effectively tracked and databased.

The federal policy was inspired by for-profit corporations that produce EVV apps, who claimed that it would save lots of money allegedly paid to cheating caregivers. A report claimed that $290 million dollars could be saved over a ten-year period (i.e., $29 million per year, nationwide). However, *The Guardian* revealed that Arkansas alone had already spent $5.7 million on its brand-new EVV program, AuthentiCare. Add to that the expenses of 49 other states, and the idea that this will save overall costs seems laughable. EVV is not a way of keeping more money in the pockets of taxpayers or government agencies, much less people with disabilities or their working-poor home aides. Instead, it is a way of transferring money from all those groups to tech-bros by forcing them to pay some Silicon Valley corporation for a novel, unnecessary service before they may continue to do what they have always done.

Another example from health care is the fact that many doctors are now coerced to evaluate patients in pain, even in emergency rooms during life-threatening health crises, using computerized algorithms owned by for-profit companies that claim to rate patients' risk of becoming drug addicts if they are granted pain medication. Whether from bias or fear of being prosecuted themselves, doctors often refuse relief to, or even "fire," patients who are given high scores by these algorithms. *Wired* reported that this market is now dominated by a corporation called Appriss, which refuses to detail, and apparently lies about, the factors used in patient ratings (Szalavitz 2021). Moreover, many people have been denied needed treatment as "potential addicts" because they had been sexually abused as children (think carefully before *ever* revealing your unhappy childhood to an allopath!), had had sick pets who got prescriptions, or had traveled long distances for medical care—because they lived in a rural area that *had* no doctors!

Most people would describe this as bigotry, cowardice, or callousness, not just such a dry-sounding thing as "complexification." But that's the underlying driver. Back in "the good ol' days" (which, to

be very clear, weren't so good for some categories of Americans) there were no federal cops breathing down the doctor's neck, or tech-bros breathing down the patient's. Only two people, the doctor and the patient, were involved in the act of prescribing a useful drug. Those (and, later, the pharmacist or nurse) are the only people who really need to be involved to complete this transaction.

Now, invisibly standing around them are a bunch of other people all with their hands out: the corporations that profit from running electronic health records, the bureaucrats and enforcers, the insurance company drones whose full-time job it is to deny coverage for prescribed treatments. None of these really contribute to the service, but all of them have to get their cut of the action before person A can treat person B. Collapse theorist John Michael Greer, in his thought-provoking book *Dark Age America* (2016), refers to this process as *intermediation*, which he defines as "the insertion of an assortment of persons, professions, and institutions between the producer and the consumer of any given good or service." The higher our population, and the more "efficiently" the valuable work is done (which reduces the number who can be employed doing it), the more people must find economic niches as intermediates, siphoning off a fraction of the cost of each transaction that actually benefits people.

To be clear, I am not saying that no management or regulation is beneficial, and Greer probably wasn't either. Things done "for our protection" that really protect us, in a way that most of us want, shouldn't be termed intermediation. People who want to have *zero* laws or regulations, if they don't desire to be subsistence farmers in isolated anarchist villages, probably desire to make a living by harming or cheating others. In the globalized processed-food era, if you don't have food inspection, you'll be eating a lot of melamine. A manufacturer of triple sinks is a provider of a valuable good to someone who is opening a restaurant and really needs to wash lots of dishes with a disinfectant rinse. However, if someone only wants to sell a few loaves of homemade bread each week at a farmer's market but her state's health regulations require that she first remodel her house to have a full commercial kitchen with self-closing doors and a triple sink, then both the bureaucrat and the sink-maker become

intermediates extracting money from transactions between two people who neither want nor need what they have to "contribute."

Remember that complexity depends upon energy supplies. In a poor society, where there is little excess energy, or money, left after basic needs are met, it isn't possible to have large numbers of people employed in jobs that don't meet real needs. In a society as rich as ours, complexification of the process of producing goods and services is bearable, or actually better than having large numbers of people unemployed and desperate. Thanks to fossil fuels, we can afford to employ more of our population, not just doing tasks that are not strictly necessary, but doing tasks that hardly anyone really *wants to have done*, than ever before in human history.

This applies not only in government, but in business and other walks of life. It is impossible to run a large business without management, but in modern times there is often layer upon layer of management between the company president and the folks who produce the goods or deliver the services. Even non-profit organizations suffer from corporate, bureaucratic management systems. If there is any advantage to this, it is that given enough time, we could unwind quite a bit of complexity, *if* as a society we pursued that option, without losing the ability to defend ourselves militarily, as Joseph Tainter noted to be the traditional fate of collapsing states.

But what will happen if declines in energy and productivity per capita, which analyses like the Limits to Growth model and Tainter's model assure us we must someday face, relatively quickly reach a point where we can't support so much complexity? Many of the people now doing unnecessary tasks have no experience in any other kind of skilled work, and are too old or ill or not strong enough to suddenly take up unskilled manual labor. Not just their status, but their survival could be threatened by rapid decomplexification. The super-rich few behind and above them (tech-bros and corporate executives and shareholders) are not at real personal risk, but are obsessed with increasing their power, wealth, and status. They will spend whatever it takes to buy the political influence to squash any proposed changes that would reduce their power, or even simply increase their tax bills.

Therefore there would be many interests fighting to preserve the status quo, even as it was dragging us down. How can such deeply entrenched complexity be simplified rapidly? Unfortunately, one common way is by violence.

Chapter 2: America's Political Collapse

There's no question that America's political system is falling apart. Members of both major parties often loathe or outright dehumanize members of the opposite party. Extreme partisanship prevents much of anything from getting done, as even the tiniest or least controversial issue can be swallowed up by rabid partisan politics. The Republican Party undermines faith in the electoral process and encourages violence more openly every year. The public thinks the situation is terrible. However, it could, and probably *will*, get much, much worse.

Barbara F. Walter, an expert on the development of civil wars globally, has just published a book, *How Civil Wars Start* (2022), in which the factors associated with civil wars are statistically analyzed—and compared to modern America. Contrary to popular belief, Walters has determined, neither poverty nor inequality are strongly associated with civil wars. Rather, a country that is in transition between autocracy and democracy—in either direction—is at by far the highest risk. Semi-democracies are often not very good at responding to public needs, but also weak enough to have trouble suppressing violence by insurgent groups.

The second major risk factor is factionalization, the creation of parties based not on political principles but on tribal identities (race, religion, region, class). The risk of war is greatest when a faction qualifies as a "superfaction," united by multiple forms of identity. For example, the Serbian faction that committed the most genocidal violence in the Yugoslavian civil war was united by ethnicity, religion (Orthodox Christianity, whereas Croats were Catholic), region, and generally rural, less educated and well-to-do population base. Furthermore, a faction that is historically oppressed is less likely to spawn serious violence than a faction that has historically

had disproportionate power and sees itself losing that power. Does that description sound familiar in any way?

Other major contributors that Walter identifies are a loss of hope—people are more likely to become violent when they stop believing that they may be able to get what they want through a nonviolent political process—and the presence of an active propaganda machine to dehumanize other factions. Regarding the latter, she emphasizes the malign influence of social media. Facebook bears significant responsibility for Myanmar's genocide of the Rohingya people, which gained support among the Buddhist majority in part because of dehumanizing and violence-promoting propaganda distributed on Facebook. Facebook and other Big Tech sites use algorithms designed to increase use by feeding users more of whatever seems to keep them logged in. People who read and like one piece of hateful content are shown more, and increasingly more extreme, hateful content. Facebook was warned about this use of its network at the time and did virtually nothing.

Civil wars among "tribal" groups that are geographically interspersed with one another often begin as, or turn into, efforts by one to commit genocide or "ethnic cleansing" against another. Walter cites a classic analysis by genocide expert Gregory Stanton ("The Ten Stages of Genocide," 1996) that enumerates eight steps typically seen before mass murder ensues. These steps are overlapping rather than linear, but generally begin in a particular order. They begin with "classification" and "symbolization": demagogues split up the population into groups labeled as different. "Discrimination" and "dehumanization" follow: the dominant group profits by treating weaker groups like dirt, and is encouraged to believe that they deserve it. These steps do not always or rapidly lead to genocide; as Walter notes, they are characteristic of white America's historic treatment of Black Americans, among others.

Later stages escalate these trends. "Organization" involves making plans and training for mass violence, which is followed by the sixth stage of "polarization." In that stage, dehumanizing propaganda is further stepped up; laws are passed to strip the target group of means of defending themselves; and both target-group leaders and

dominant-group moderates are targeted for violence. In the "preparation" stage, armies or militias are further built and armed and there is an escalation of fear-mongering rhetoric claiming that the target group must be killed in "self-defense." "Political processes such as peace accords that threaten the dominance of the ruling group ... may actually trigger genocide," Stanton warns. In stage eight, "persecution," acts of genocide begin: killings, torture, deprivation of property, forced displacement or confinement to ghettos or regions with inadequate food and water, sporadic massacres. If the international community does not rapidly intervene, this will proceed to stage nine, "extermination." (The tenth stage is "denial.")

By the criteria that flag other countries as being high-risk for civil war, Walter concludes, the United States is now at high risk. The full title of Walter's book is *How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them*. She offers a few proposals that, in an ideal world, might be able to do just that. Unfortunately, the archaic structure of our government combined with the cesspool that is the Internet may make the hope that our degradation can be reversed little more than a fantasy. Let's briefly consider the ways in which America appears to be approaching the brink of civil war, especially with respect to the criteria of factionalism and democratic backsliding.

Factionalism: Red Tribe vs. Blue Tribe

The increase in political tribalism over the past decades, and particularly in the past ten years, is obvious to every American who is paying attention. With the active assistance of the Republican Party in particular, we have developed a gigantic urban-rural political divide. Political scientist David Hopkins (2021) noted from census and political figures that this divide has widened drastically in the past decade. In the 1980s to mid-1990s, the gap in presidential voting preferences between the nation's largest metro areas and its rural counties was about the same as that between the Northeastern and Southeastern states. The urban-rural gap thereafter began to widen, and in the past two elections, while the North-South gap had narrowed to 9%, the urban-rural gap was *three times larger*. Hopkins explained that southern urban areas and northern rural areas had been

"shedding some of their sectional distinctiveness," becoming more like northern urban areas and southern rural areas respectively. *Slate* reported that, of the 1636 non-Alaskan counties that shrank in the 2010s (which means, largely rural counties), 90% voted for Donald Trump in the 2020 election (Weissmann 2021). This leads to the phenomenon of maps throughout the country showing "blue dots ... surrounded by a sea of red rural hinterlands."

Will Wilkinson (2021) has interpreted the widespread rural embrace of the GOP, and in particular Trumpism, as the "Southernification of rural America." The influence pushing rapid cultural change in rural areas is clearly from the south to the north, not vice versa. Southern ruralites are not seen adopting the beliefs, culture, or speech of New England farmers, only the reverse. Wilkinson gives the example of a self-described "Yankee Mainer" who shows his support for Donald Trump by display of the Confederate battle flag, which is now seen in rural areas throughout the country. As he sees the situation, "residential self-selection on ethnicity, personality and education" (i.e., non-white, liberally-inclined, and educated people moving away) have made rural areas "progressively more homogenously ethnocentric and socially conservative." (As Elie Mystal [2021] observes, "So long as white people continue to make their states unwelcoming to newcomers of color, they can be assured of an outsize voice in the nation's politics.")

Wilkinson's key suggestion about Southernification is that before those increasingly homogenous areas could be organized into a political movement of a size and strength to allow Trump to win the presidency with an ethnonationalist campaign, they "needed to be consolidated first through the adoption of a relatively uniform ethnocentric white culture." As long as rural white Mainers, Alabamans, Arizonans, and Oregonians see themselves as four different groups, none has the numbers needed to dominate the national government. If they could be persuaded that their common rurality and whiteness makes them all part of the same group—and there are powerful interests working to persuade them of that—that group's numbers would be very large and its political power even greater. For Northern ruralites who feel excluded from the culture of nearby cities

or simply dislike it, adopting Southern behavior, culture, and symbols is a way of joining a large and powerful tribe.

In Barbara Walter's terms, this makes the parties *superfactions*, like the Serbs vs. the Croats and Bosnians in Yugoslavia. America's Red and Blue tribes are separated by ruralism vs. urbanism and still to an extent by region, but also by their racial and religious composition. The Republican Party, despite recent inroads among religious Hispanic voters, is largely a white and Christian party, as many Republican politicians try to win white votes by whipping up fear of menacing or conniving non-whites and non-Christians (or bad Christians, such as sexual minorities and overeducated urbanites). The Democratic Party, concentrating on winning votes in diverse cities, at least claims to support equal rights for citizens of all races and religions, and sometimes places what white voters consider too much emphasis on ethnic diversity; non-white voters are a critical voting bloc, with a supermajority supporting Democrats. Thus the "average Red" and "average Blue" see themselves as differing not just in who they vote for, but in several meaningful aspects of their identities.

Recall also that violence is especially likely when a dominant group sees itself losing power. While it remains ridiculous to claim that white men are an oppressed class, their still-above-average shares of economic and political power are not as great as they used to be. America has gone from being a totally white-dominated nation to a nation in which non-whites, in some areas, have the numbers and access to voting to have a real voice in the political process. For several decades, Christian conservatives were restricted in their ability to make and enforce laws reflecting their beliefs. These facts have created—or been deliberately used to create—fear, resentment, and hostility in the groups whose power has declined.

Rural areas, as I will describe later, have very disproportionate political power, yet it has not translated into economic power; rather, their economic and social conditions continue to decline. The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) reports that many rural regions have lost population in every county, sometimes by 10% to 20% or more in the last decade alone. Rural young people who cannot find good jobs, or any jobs, move to cities where they can get education and work. No

community can thrive when its children move away, and America's rural areas are genuinely suffering. Average, working-class rural whites are not wrong to feel disempowered, though those who wish to blame urban minorities for the fact have been tragically misled.

The precariousness of a semi-democracy

Minority rule is common in American states today, even excluding the issue of voter suppression and considering only those people who actually can and do vote. With the detailed data now available on voter identities and locations, computer-assisted gerrymandering now allow the party controlling a state when district lines are drawn to guarantee itself a large majority in the legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives delegation even if they gain a minority of the votes. Both parties have gerrymandered and still do today, to be clear, but recently the practice has mostly benefitted the Republican Party, following the brilliantly strategized Project Redmap campaign in 2010 in which conservative megadonors poured money into conservative candidates for specific legislative districts in swing states.

Taking narrow control of many legislatures just in time for post-census redistricting, the GOP then imposed extreme gerrymanders that ensured they would hold majorities, or even supermajorities, in future elections even if they lost the popular vote. These gerrymanders frequently focus on minimizing the voice of city residents in legislatures and the U.S. House of Representatives. As a notable example, Wisconsin voters in 2018 cast 203,000 more votes for Democratic than Republican candidates for the state assembly, yet Republicans claimed 63 of 99 seats, leading the Election Integrity Project to rate Wisconsin's election integrity as comparable to that of Bahrain and the Congo (Daley and Goldstein 2021).

Wisconsin's congressional districts are similarly gerrymandered. At the moment their congressmen include three Democrats, one from a slightly Republican-leaning district and two from districts that lean Democrat by 18-25 points, and five Republicans from districts that lean Republican by 7-12 points (Wikipedia 2021). Thus, more Democratic votes than Republican votes are "wasted." This is not an

accident, but the result of meticulous data analysis. In a "war against cities," as Paul London (2021) calls it, the Republican Party engages in ever greater efforts to ensure rural dominance of state legislatures regardless of voters' geographic distribution or, of course, party preferences.

Democrats who are effectively disenfranchised by gerrymandering are naturally unhappy, but it's not great for moderate Republicans either, which is why some states are facing enough citizen backlash that attempts to force reform are being made. Few people vote in primaries, and those tend to be the most dedicated partisans—or, put another way, the most fanatical. In a competitive district, to the extent that those still exist, partisans of both parties know that nominating an obvious kook will guarantee loss in the general election. In a non-competitive district, it is all too easy for extremists to win the primary and then automatically win the general election. Yes, when the extremist is a white nationalist or QAnon nut, it doesn't speak well of the electorate that they prefer that to a Democrat. Still, most of them might rather have had a sane Republican, and if gerrymandering prevents that, then it's a problem for them too.

In several GOP minority-ruled states, legislatures have then passed laws to strip state-level executive officials, such as the governor or attorney general, of their customary powers whenever the people seek to keep some check on the legislature's power by electing a Democrat to statewide office. Other comfortably GOP-ruled states have targeted the legal authority of African-American progressives elected to office in majority-Black cities. In such states, the "war against cities" does not only mean that state governments will not support expenditures that mostly benefit urban people and economies, such as public transport. They sometimes actively seek to harm urbanites' interests: cutting funding for programs that are believed or claimed to benefit primarily urbanites, tying the hands of local officials who wish to reduce police brutality, forbidding urban mask mandates during a pandemic, sending COVID-19 vaccines first or more generously to rural counties even if the ruralites don't want them, passing voting laws tailored to impede urbanites, attempting to

throw out or confiscate all the ballots of urban counties, and passing laws entitling GOP state boards to take over urban election boards.

You will recall that civil-war expert Barbara Walter mentioned that nations transitioning towards or away from democracy are at particular risk of civil war. This was measured by a "polity index scale" running from -10 (absolute tyranny) to +10 (perfect democracy) as calculated by the Polity Project. Nations in the mid-range of the scale ("anocracies"), -5 to +5, were at much more risk than either democracies (+6 to +10) or full-scale autocracies; the -1 to +1 range was by far the most dangerous. Since 1800, the United States had always been in the +8 to +10 range, usually at +10. In 2016, because our elections were considered by international observers to have been free but partially unfair, our score dropped to +8. It later dropped to +7 when President Trump, as the culmination of a variety of efforts to expand his powers and immunity to law, simply ignored Congress' "right and authority to oversee the executive branch," and was backed in that by Congressional Republicans. After the 2020 election, the basic democratic criterion of a peaceful transition of power was not met, as on January 6, 2021, Trump responded to his loss by whipping up an intended lynch mob to violently assault the Congress. This attempted self-coup dropped our polity index temporarily to +5, into the "semi-democratic" range. "Let that sink in. We are no longer the world's oldest continuous democracy," Walter writes.

One potential outcome of current trends is a fascist coup d'êtat. Support by Republican elected officials for right-wing violence and even overthrow of the U.S. government has ratcheted upwards during the past year and a half, and become increasingly overt. For example—from late August 2021—consider extremist Rep. Madison Cawthorn's claim that violent January 6 rioters who were arrested after trying to forcibly overturn the presidential election were "political prisoners" and that if other elections were "rigged" and "stolen" there would be "bloodshed" (e.g., Shabad 2021). Cawthorn gave lip service to not *wanting* to "hav[e] to pick up arms against a fellow American," but made it clear that that's what he thought should happen if elections continued to be "stolen" by Democrats'

winning them. As author Stephen Marche (2022a) puts it, "The Republican Party has become a movement with a political and an armed wing." This is reminiscent of parties in other countries that have been torn apart by violence, such as Northern Ireland.

Since we, as believers in climate change, are part of the reality-based community, let's state as a fact that Biden, like him or not, won the 2020 presidential election by several million votes. No significant election fraud was found in several swing states that went for Biden, sometimes while electing Republicans to statewide offices. To the extremist wing of today's GOP, "a steal" means enough Black people voting to affect the outcome of an election. They are responding by creating legal or pseudo-legal mechanisms to prevent urbanites and minorities from voting in future, or even to discard votes that have been cast and counted. Unfortunately, these mechanisms, including driving out honest election officials, replacing them with fanatics, and seizing power over urban election boards, are well in progress in several swing states. There is a national campaign, far more professional and better-funded than the shambolic 2021 attempted coup, dedicated to ensuring that if Democrats manage to vote in swing states in sufficient numbers to win the presidential race in 2024, Trump-loyalist Secretaries of State or gerrymandered GOP legislatures will be able to simply hand their states' votes to presumed candidate Trump (e.g., Gellman 2021).

This would constitute a coup d'êtat, which would create a major crisis for other national governments and drop us into—at the very best, assuming that other elections weren't also hopelessly tainted or nullified by decree of the GOP—that deadly semi-autocratic polity index midrange in which civil wars are most likely. You might assume that such a war would be started by the faction who were disenfranchised, who would reasonably lack faith in the possibility of a future democratic process. However, that faction is not a dominant group, and is far less well-armed and emotionally prepared than the dominant faction to start an outright civil war (more on that later). There certainly would be street protests, some either violent or met with police violence, which could be used as pretext to whip up

further hatred and fear of the protesting faction and call for mass militia violence, which the coup government might well encourage.

Slouching towards genocide

If even those anti-democratic schemes aren't enough to let the right wing hold power in an increasingly urbanized and brown-skinned America, they are making it increasingly clear, Plan C for some is to simply seize power and shoot the winners and anyone who stands up in their defense. The fact that many Republican Congressmen say they would have favored the overturning of the presidential election through a violent assault on Congress is emblematic of the problem. A poll in June 2021 found that about 8% of surveyed Americans agreed not only that the 2020 election was "stolen" and Biden "illegitimate" (which over a fifth of respondents espoused), but that "use of force is justified" to place Trump back into the office (Pape 2021). The poll had a 4% margin of error, so this violence-supporting group might range from 10 million to 31 million in size, though the middle-of-the-road estimate was 21 million. Assuming the number to be 21 million, at least 7 million own guns; 3 million have served in the military and been trained to kill; and 6 million would espouse support for right-wing extremist groups, though less than a million actually belong to one. More than half also express support for elements of white nationalist and QAnon conspiracy theories.

That's a lot of potentially violent and dangerous people. Try to imagine if seven million armed urban Americans had espoused the belief in 2016 that Hillary Clinton's loss after Russian and FBI intervention (and her own crappy, self-centered campaign) was illegitimate, therefore she should be installed in office by killing whoever stood in her way. It's hard to imagine such a counterfactual, but imagine the frothing among conservative talking heads if it had been the case—even if it was all talk, and not one shot was ever fired or fire extinguisher swung at a Capitol police officer.

Moreover, that survey wasn't a one-time aberration following the stress and conflict over Trump's attempted coup. A poll of over 8000 U.S. citizens in May 2022 found that half expected a civil war within

the next few years; nearly a third claimed to believe Trump's Big Lie, while a fifth espoused belief in QAnon conspiracy theories; even more claimed to support white nationalist conspiracy ideas (Pilkington 2022). As a result, almost a quarter said they would support violence "to preserve an American way of life based on Western European traditions," and about half of those said they would participate to some degree; 7.1% said they would personally kill to support a political goal. That would equate to 18 million Americans.

There are crazy extremists in every political faction, of course, and the left is no exception. However, right-wing violence driven largely by dissatisfied rural men, sometimes traveling long distances to cities to do anything from intimidating residents to killing them, has hugely increased in recent years, and greatly exceeds serious leftist violence. Increasingly, anyone doing anything perceived as "liberal," whether executing the duties of an elected legislator or school board member, peacefully assembling to petition for redress of grievances, or even attending a book reading in a bookstore or library, has to fear the possible appearance of armed and menacing militia members.

We are also seeing overtly eliminationist rhetoric that calls for the mass killing of disliked groups, put out mostly by civil war advocates and plotters, white nationalists, and bloodthirsty conspiracy theorists (groups that have considerable overlap). In 2019, white nationalist Congressman Steve King posted a meme on his Facebook campaign page saying "Folks keep talking about a civil war. One side has about 8 trillion bullets, while the other side doesn't know which bathroom to use." He "annotated the image with a smirking emoji and mused, 'Wonder who would win....'" (Thebault 2019). He doesn't quite say that trans people will be slaughtered en masse in his planned future, but it's certainly implicit.

In the previous chapter we noted how the escalating costs of a complex society lead to resentment among working classes who have to pay for it. The solution some of America's resentful workers or self-proclaimed workers envision, egged on by fascist or "populist" opinion molders, is to exterminate everyone whose jobs appear overly complex, leaving the Real Americans free of the burden of their

existence. Here are two anonymous comments responding to conservative blog posts on the subject of COVID-19 vaccination:

> [A] lot of non-covaxxers have guns and ammunition and know how to use them, and they will not meekly submit to the PMC coronapansies of whom they know they could make very short work. Not only that, these Flyover-Folk know how to do for themselves and get things done while the coastal PMC office-fauna would prove entirely useless in a situation where modern urban amenities are scarce.

> When does the majority lose enough faith in the system that they begin taking the law into their own hands? ... It does not take a lot of intelligence to go through an employee list of an institution and compare it with a local tax map. Do you happen to have the same name as someone on the Pfizer board and have a fancy car parked in your garage? It's probably time to start thinking about that stuff.

These comments are quoted *not* because they are extreme, but because they're relatively moderate, since the website's owner at that time censored direct calls for violence. PMC means Professional-Managerial Class, that is, anyone who has a college degree and an office desk, except for those in a few professions viewed as blue-collar or reliably conservative. If you fall into that category, or expect to once you're out of college, you might be surprised to know that there are possibly millions of Americans who not only want you dead, but fantasize about personally killing you. It will come as no surprise to Black Americans, immigrants, sexual minorities, etc. that many such people count them among the evil Elite, whatever their income, often with the rationale that their groups are favored by the PMC or failed to support Trump.

We must ask about current violence, as we do about electoral-suppression efforts: where does it go from there? Remember Stanton's "ten stages of genocide"? Walker estimates that we are at least in stage five ("organization"), if not stage six ("polarization"). The first can't be argued with: there are militias hoarding and training

with weapons and ammo, extremist youth joining the military for the purpose of learning to kill, and extremist veterans passing on their training to others. These activities have been going on for decades. They used to ramp up whenever a Democrat was elected; an alarming difference is that they did not decline when Trump was elected, but actually increased. As Steven Marche (2022b) puts it:

> Calls to violence . . . [and] to resist white replacement are normal in rightwing media. The inevitable result is the promotion of violent resistance to white replacement. . . . [Republican officials'] calls for violence, while never direct, create a climate of rage that solidifies into regular physical assaults on their enemies. The technical term for this process is stochastic terrorism. . . .

There's a continuum between stage four, dehumanization, and stage six, polarization, where the aspect of hateful speech is concerned. Some might say that we aren't into stage six yet. Others might suggest that people's increasingly sorting themselves geographically by faction, because their physical safety or livelihood was explicitly threatened when they lived among the other faction or they feared that it might be, is an early "lite" version of coerced segregation. Some might also say that new state laws making it legal for drivers to mow down peaceful protesters who step into a street (or are even *crossing* a street; e.g., Stancil 2022) or for armed citizens to shoot anyone in a public place who is perceived as threatening—with the clear, if unspoken understanding that these will *never, ever* be applied to leftists running over abortion-clinic picketers or to Black people shooting confrontational rednecks—amount to early declarations of open season on the dangerous, subhuman Blue Tribe. Once polarization reaches a certain level, only the stage of "preparation" remains to create the practical requirements that pave the way for acts of genocidal violence much more severe and numerous than the white supremacist mass shootings seen to date. We may be closer than we think to widespread eruptions of terrorism that will make today look like the good old days.

I'm largely criticizing the right wing here because they are most of the problem. To be clear, bigotry and hatred are increasing among both major factions; that's how polarization works. It's easy to find liberals who will assert that all Republicans are evil and stupid. This is wrong, both factually and morally, and just as ugly as right-wing bigotry. The difference is that you'll have to search much longer to find a large group of armed leftists who will tell you that their hope and plan for the future is to *kill* all of those people, down to their kids and old folks.

It's still the case that many people who say hateful things and even espouse violence are just shooting their mouths off out of frustration. Middle-class, educated, and/or nonwhite urbanites should have sympathy for the difficulties faced by working-class ruralites (even if those people are often notably unsympathetic to the problems of the urban working poor). However, they also need to recognize, for their own safety, that there's a strong fascist tendency among the American right that sees them as ideal scapegoats. Fascists despise "the weak." If you don't own guns and can't imagine yourself killing a human being even in self-defense, that doesn't make fascists think it would be unfair to murder you. Your very helplessness makes such people, like the guy who mowed down a bunch of bicycle racers with his truck just for being bike riders, think that you deserve death *even more*. People who have adopted fascist ideology can rarely be reached by moral arguments, because, after eating up years of propaganda about how subhuman and threatening outgroup members are, they simply do not value those people's lives.

The history of colonialism shows that whenever a group that has lots of guns decides to wipe out a group that lacks guns, the result is a slaughter. Statista (2021a) reports that 50% of Republicans admit to owning at least one gun, versus only 21% of Democrats. Steve King, imbecilic as he is, had a real point that his intended victims ought to pay attention to. More urban liberals and minorities are buying guns and learning to shoot these days because they have come to believe that the best way to deter fascists from showing up on their doorstep to kill them the day after the rule of law breaks down, or killing them on the streets today, is to make that a risky proposition. (They may

also get around to noticing that it's a problem if one side of a gunfight has military-grade body armor, not to mention hard-to-monitor personal radios [Fenton 2022] and the other has sweatshirts and bike helmets and easily spied-upon cell phones.) I believe they are wise to do so, and in fact, would be wise to step up the pace of it tenfold or a hundredfold.

At the same time, as Walter suggests, preparations for self- or community defense can create a security trap. If a dominant superfaction's leaders are training it to fear and hate another faction as an existential threat, seeing that faction arming itself will be interpreted as evidence that "Them" really are plotting to wipe "Us" out, creating a rationale for the ingroup to escalate its preparations for war even further. A vicious cycle can all too easily ensue. Still, since each member of each faction only has two hands, twenty guns per capita vs. one is a far less unbalanced scenario than two vs. 0.1.

Since I strongly oppose Republican fascism, you may assume that I'm a Democrat. In truth, I'm very displeased with the Democratic Party for several reasons, and vote for them only as the lesser evil. They've become a party dedicated to comfortable business-as usual. Their more liberal wing admit that we have environmental problems, yet seldom admit that we face fundamental resource supply problems that will limit how we can handle the environmental problems. Cornucopia economics is alive and well among them. The moderate BAU majority refuse to consider solving solvable problems, while resources are still plentiful, by reinstating the high taxes on the super-rich that were a feature of America's most prosperous decades. The party's geriatric leaders aren't actively seeking to make matters worse, unlike the GOP's leadership, but they sure aren't doing much to make them better. In an ideal world, I'd like to see the whole party dumpstered and replaced with a new party.

That said, we used to have a nation in which two major parties competed for votes in semi-democratic elections by proposing different platforms. Whoever got more votes held power for the next couple of years, and whoever got fewer faced the need to either change their platform or learn to make it sound more appealing. That's changed, and not only due to extreme gerrymandering.

Perhaps when the GOP had no platform at all in 2020, except "Whatever Donald Trump wants," that was the inflection point. Now, we have one party that seeks to win votes, and one party that seeks to suppress or discard votes and hints ever more openly that if that's not enough to give them total power, perhaps someday soon they will take it by killing Democratic officeholders and candidates, killing election officials ... maybe party activists and voting rights campaigners ... maybe voters, as happened in the South up to the 1960s? Again, I wonder, how far would it go? The fact that elected officials keep speaking in support of armed white nationalists and QAnon goons is a really bad sign.

The fundamental choice the two parties are now offering us is not between two party platforms neither of which we love. It's whether we will continue to have a democratic system *at all* in the future. As you will see throughout this book, I favor secular democracy, whatever its failings, and I assume that most of the people who might read this book will too. Those of you who don't should really ask yourselves how certain you are that the would-be dictators or theocrats would create a nation you'd be happy in, long-term—because if you weren't, your ability to protest, riot, or even whine about it on the Internet would be gone. Those who do need to start asking themselves what they will do, and how they will try to survive and protect their loved ones, if the United States sinks into fascism, not in some distant post-industrial future, but in 2025. The possibility is all too real.

Another possibility, which might follow after a fascist regime or, at least for some states, provide a superior alternative to it, is that in the relatively near future there will *be* no United States. All states and empires eventually cease to exist as such; the time when the U.S. as we know it vanishes might be sooner than we think. Let's consider that possibility and its implications next.

Chapter 3: Breaking Up the Union?

In addition to the widespread urban-rural divide in America, there are, historically, conflicts among regions whose differing environments, economies, and cultures would lead them to favor different political policies. At the moment, these regions are strongly tied together by mass fossil-fueled transport of people and goods and by electronic communications. (Surely TV and the Internet are main drivers of the Southernification of rural areas.) However, the continental U.S. "homeland" alone is extraordinarily large by the standards of pre-fossil fuel empires. Several authors have noted that, under the façade of shared consumer culture, the United States contains multiple regions that are as different in culture and environment as neighboring nations on other continents might be. At some point, long-distance travel and shipping and possibly even communications will be reduced by declining energy supplies, infrastructure, and wealth, possibly coupled with extremist violence. As a result, some have suggested, the breakup of the United States might follow naturally, perhaps even peacefully.

There are many civil war proponents, noted previously, whose dream is not to separate from the faction(s) identified as Others, but to massacre or subjugate them in every state of the Union. I hope they are too small a minority to succeed, but because millions of them have gone far enough to get combat training and acquire substantial weaponry, the "Others" would be wise to take them seriously and prepare to respond appropriately. Other proponents merely dream of dividing the Union into multiple nations to remove limits imposed by voters from other regions on their ability to rule *their* region as they wish. This is now a minority fantasy, but there are hints that it might get increasing public buy-in as time goes on.

Bright Line Watch (2021) polled Americans about their interest in a breakup scheme that would divide the continental U.S. into five countries, which had very questionable borders that would be unlikely in any voluntary breakup. Nevertheless, a quarter to a third of respondents in each of the pollster-defined regions said they would support the scheme presented. Usually, Republicans were most in favor, though in the Northeast and Pacific areas Democrats were most in favor. Very few Democrats favored it in the other three regions, probably because those respondents could foresee losing at best preferred social policies, and at worst basic civil rights and liberties, if they were placed in conservative-dominated segregate nations without the protection of the U.S. Constitution. (To put it more pointedly, they envisioned a serious risk of ending up living in New Gilead.)

Of course, it's easy to express your rage at the status quo by telling a pollster you'd support breakup when there's no real imminent possibility of such a huge and frightening change. But as we decline, we might get to the point where a majority would express support, and even vote for it out of anger and frustration, as a majority of British voters chose to take the U.K. out of the European Union. If divisive propaganda continues, as the world gets bigger again, more Americans might feel that they have little in common with people from the opposite end of the U.S. As the economy shrinks or even collapses, more Americans might believe that they would benefit from a breakup that would remove the burden of federal laws, regulations, and taxes. Additionally, making the U.S. cease to exist might be seen as a good way to get rid of the U.S. federal debt, which is already so large that it would be politically almost impossible to pay off except through hyperinflation—that is, deliberately destroying the value of our own currency.

It is also relevant that the people whom the government would be counting on to forcibly suppress secessionist movements are among those bearing the heaviest costs of decline. The *Washington Post* reported that National Guard members, reservists, and their families, because of frequent deployments during the pandemic and meager or delayed payments for service, were twice as likely to be food-insec-

ure as other Americans in early 2021 (Reiley 2021). While military spokesmen said that they had not heard complaints of hunger, an advocacy organization pointed out to the *Post*'s reporter that known financial problems can cost a soldier a promotion or security clearance, creating a strong incentive to pay bills instead of buying groceries. Is it to a nation's long-term benefit if the guys who are given heavy weaponry with which to maintain the status-quo order (the National Guard being frequently called out to police or terrorize Black Lives Matter demonstrations) can't afford to feed their kids? Might they start noticing that the status quo isn't so great for them?

Because current "boogaloo" or civil-war supporters are mostly white supremacists or nationalists, some may assume that breakup of the Union is and will remain a right-wing desire, driven solely by regions whose citizens or ruling classes want the freedom to impose overtly Christian nationalist government or to seize federal lands and Native Americans' freshwater for free use by white ranchers and farmers. We should not presume that this will remain the case. Arguably, more liberal regions have just as much reason as conservative regions to think they might profit from breakup, *provided that* borders are drawn so that they retain enough farmland to permit their residents to survive without immediately going to war to obtain more land.

Primarily, federal redistribution of wealth favors rural states. Nine of the ten states most dependent on federal funding are "red", as are eight of the ten states where per-capita federal spending most greatly exceeds federal taxes paid, whereas eight of the ten states that get back the smallest fraction of what they pay in taxes are "blue" (Gordon 2021). Much of this disparity is only logical. Large rural states need more highway dollars per capita and more spending on federal land management; large military bases are not placed in densely populated areas. Much of the rest consists of transfers of wealth from wealthier to poorer areas, which any government that cares about its citizens' well-being ought to do. However, when blue-state urbanites see red-state politicians refuse to spend tax dollars on city residents' needs because they are "not Real Americans," they might reasonably say: "If you don't see us as citizens of the same

country, why are we paying for your infrastructure? Without you, our taxes would be lower."

Rural states have disproportionate power in the U.S. Senate, which they used, for example, during the Trump administration to hurt urbanites by cutting income tax deductions that primarily made it easier for residents of cities or densely populated (blue) states with high housing costs and state taxes to pay their taxes and obtain housing (London 2021). There has been liberal media attention recently regarding the even greater power small states will have in future as the population becomes (it is presumed) even more concentrated in urban areas. However, in fact the most populous nine states *today* have over 50% of the population, and the top 16 states have 67.5% of the population (World Population Review 2021). Thus, more than enough senators to override a presidential veto (68, from 34 states) are already selected by less than one-third of the population (32.5%). As Elie Mystal (2021) observed, "More Black people live in the five boroughs of New York City than all of the people who live in the Dakotas ... these Dakotas get four votes in the Senate while Black New York City residents get, like, a 10 percent say in their state's two senators."

By no means are all of the populous states "blue," nor are all of the smallest states "red," so we do not have a fixed tyranny of the minority in party terms. However, as economic limits tighten, the incentive for small states to better their relative position by squeezing big states harder will surely increase. If this tendency plus the demographics of the major parties created an increasingly conspicuous trend of mostly red regions sticking it to mostly blue regions, the blue regions might well start to think breakup was in their interest.

Additionally, as of this writing, with Roe v. Wade just overturned, the right wing is beginning to pursue laws in some red states that would criminalize blue-staters who "abet" women who left red states because they needed abortions. This is unconstitutional (and reminiscent of the Fugitive Slave Act), but that doesn't mean this Supreme Court wouldn't allow it.There's also a mounting plot to shove a no-exceptions national abortion ban through Congress when the GOP takes power again. Most Americans consider some

restrictions on abortion to be reasonable, but a no-exceptions ban is profoundly unpopular in blue regions, including some states that now send mostly Republicans to the House because of gerrymandering and vote suppression.

Then, too, Christian nationalists have other goals: Clarence Thomas' concurring opinion overturning Roe also called for the reconsideration of "Griswold, Lawrence, and Obergefell" (Greve 2022). Those, if you don't know, include the Court cases that said states could not throw straight married couples in prison for using birth control, nor gay couples for making love. That proposal, made at that moment, reveals that banning abortion for raped children or ectopic pregnancies is not actually about the "baybee," because no embryos are harmed when people use contraception or take gay lovers; it's about theocracy, patriarchy, and making the public live in such a way as to produce as many future Christian soldiers as possible. A significant fraction of the Blue faction may be Christian, but not *this* kind of Christian. If they can no longer prevent the federal government from turning theocratic, many Blues might be eager to escape it.

At this time, the GOP does have a built-in advantage in the Senate, while a slim majority of the population usually votes Democrat (regardless of that party's many failings). Consider other possible consequences of escalating extreme partisanship, like that displayed by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell when he said that his goal was for President Obama to fail. Or when most of Biden's nominees for positions such as ambassadorships languish because one GOP senator wishes to entirely shut down his State Department to punish him for not imposing sanctions on an ally (Toosi and Ward 2021), while Republicans prevent the Small Business Administration from both filling positions and conducting committee business (Wu 2021). Or when a Republican minority leader threatens to ban telecoms from doing business when the GOP takes over again if they comply with the law during a Democratic administration. Or when the GOP threatens to force a default on the national debt, which increased by over $7 trillion under Trump, and collapse the global economy because that would *really* stick it to the Democrats. These

days these behaviors, which would once have been shocking national news, are so common that they scarcely attract notice.

Suppose that next time the Senate has a Republican majority, its leaders announce that from now on, Democratic presidents will not be allowed, not only to appoint a Supreme Court justice under any circumstances whatsoever, but to have *any* federal judges, cabinet officers or ambassadors confirmed, as the Constitution expects him or her to do, or to permit *any* federal agency to function? Suppose that rather than simply failing to effectively combat the next pandemic that hits diverse coastal cities first (Eban 2020), a Republican administration actually prohibited blue states from instituting their own public health measures, in the same way that Republican state governments have forbidden densely populated cities full of Democratic voters to mandate mask-wearing during COVID-19 outbreaks?

Again, to be clear, the Democratic Party is not free of destructive partisanship by any means (and the net benefits of all those pandemic-era shutdowns and mask mandates are now being questioned based on legitimate science). However, only the GOP is openly pursuing and implementing policies based on the principle that any opposition to their party is illegitimate. First, as they see it, Democrats should not be allowed to be elected, no matter what the public wants. Second, if they do manage to take office, they should not be allowed to exercise the ordinary powers of that office. Third, so long as they technically hold office, anything possible should be done to inflict punishment on the state, city, or entire nation that elected them. At some point, the many millions of Americans who are effectively disenfranchised by these games may get fed up and think they'd be better off in a separate nation from the states whose politicians were responsible.

And let's not forget that, as noted above, an increasing number of Republican elected officials are showing open sympathy to the idea of nullifying an election in the near future by imprisoning if not killing the winners and imposing a right-wing dictator in place of a President. If *that* happened, the blue states would indeed find it very much in their interests to secede, as many of their residents would be

in line for concentration camps or worse under the regime(s) that would likely follow.

Regional divisions in America

Americans have started thinking of themselves as divided just into Red and Blue factions, which are tribes that couldn't peaceably be divided along geographic lines without mass migration because largely Blue cities and towns can't form a cohesive landmass separated from surrounding Red rural areas. As Hopkins (2021) and Wilkinson (2021) have noted, there is a dramatic recent trend in that direction due to the "Southernification" of rural areas. Historically, though, our divisions are far more complex, and regional as well as urban vs. rural. "Southernification" has largely been created artificially through mass culture and various forms of electronic propaganda. The fact is that white ruralites in Maine and Arizona or North Dakota and Alabama have little more in common, except for shared language, than ruralites in France and Germany, who certainly do not view themselves as part of the same tribe. Several authors have analyzed the distribution of regional cultures in North America, which may give some insight into our political divisions.

A seminal early work was Joel Garreau's *Nine Nations of North America* (1981). In it, Garreau recognized nine distinct cultural "nations" within North America. These were: New England (including parts of eastern Canada); Quebec; The Foundry (the Rust Belt, Great Lakes region, extending to Chicago and the D.C. suburbs); Dixie (extending through southern Indiana, Illinois and Missouri to east Texas); The Islands (the Caribbean, including the southernmost tip of Florida); The Breadbasket (the best farming states, from north Texas to central Illinois, north through south-central Canada); Mexamerica (the heavily Latino southwestern border areas, with at least some of Mexico); Ecotopia (the wet coastal strip from mid-California through Alaska); and The Empty Quarter (the harsh, dry remainder of the West, including most of Alaska and western Canada).

State borders, Garreau said, were largely irrelevant to the distribution of these "nations", and their borders commonly did not coincide with state borders, instead following ecological or cultural

discontinuities. Northern California, for instance, is quite different from southern California culturally, as is northern Illinois from southern Illinois; it makes perfect sense that their residents would have different regional affiliations. Garreau's view of our cultural divides, if still relevant in the present day, provide a hint of how we might break up the Union.

However, it doesn't provide a blueprint. First, at least one of the included "nations" couldn't be self-supporting. New England, with a very small land area, some large cities, a short growing season, and poor soil, would scarcely be able to feed itself (Kurtz et al. 2020), and Ecotopia might have a tough time as well. Second, because of the amount of power held by state governments in our political system, any breakup into new confederations that was not preceded by total collapse of government would almost certainly be done state-by-state. State governments would have good reasons not to want to cede portions of their territory to neighboring nations. If the fringe areas that might want to be ceded were productive agricultural areas, ceding them could amount to the central urban population's letting themselves be walled into a reservation too small to feed them. If the fringe areas were urban, since urban areas are the primary producers of wealth, the central rural administration might be unwilling to let them go even if it wasn't too fond of much of the population.

In the late 1990s a Russian analyst named Igor Panarin proposed that the U.S. was nearing the point of collapse and breakup into multiple successor nations. He expected this to happen by 2010, so his predictive abilities were less than perfect. A map of his predictions published by *The Atlantic* (Ottenhoff 2010) depicted the continental U.S. as forming four geographically contiguous nations. (Alaska and Hawai'i would be separate, perhaps allying with or being taken over by Russia and an Asian power respectively.) "Atlantic America" in Panarin's vision would include all the eastern seaboard states from New England south to South Carolina, plus Kentucky and Tennessee. The "Texas Republic" would include the Deep South west to Texas and Oklahoma, plus New Mexico. The "Californian Republic" would extend from Washington and Idaho to California and Arizona, while the "Central North-American

Republic" would include everything else, from Montana to Colorado in the west, east to Missouri, Michigan, and Ohio.

Panarin evidently thought all four of these "republics" might either join or be dominated or influenced by existing powers: respectively the E.U., Mexico, China, and Canada. It's a tidy arrangement, offering conveniently shaped successor nations, although Atlantic America might have trouble feeding itself. However, I question how well he really understood America. Many of the states in his map seem very strangely placed indeed, and boundaries like these would be more likely to inspire warfare than prevent it.

Colin Woodard's recent *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (2012) presents a far more complicated map than Garreau's of the distribution of Amer-ican cultural "nations," based on his perception that the cultural differences among colonial groups persisted in their descendants, spread as the colonized areas spread, and continue to influence present-day populations. Some of Woodard's main groupings are similar to Garreau's, e.g., New France for Quebec, El Norte for a differently delimited Mexamerica, The Left Coast for Ecotopia, and The Far West for the majority of the Empty Quarter, with most of central and northern Canada separated as First Nation. Woodard's equivalent of Dixie, the Deep South, is much more geographically restricted, excluding southern Florida as well as southern Louisiana, which forms a second outpost of New France.

The rest of the eastern U.S., in Woodard's estimation, is far more complicated. To him, eastern South Carolina and southeastern North Carolina reflects a unique Tidewater culture. From Tidewater west and southwest to northern and central Texas, including the southern parts of Ohio through Illinois and the northern edges of Alabama and Georgia, is Greater Appalachia. Yankeedom includes not only New England and most of New York State, but a swathe directly westward around and west of the Great Lakes: primarily Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, with a bit of Ohio and the northern edge of Illinois. New Netherland is the New York City, northern New Jersey, and surrounding bits of New York and Connecticut that were colonized first mainly by the Dutch.

The remainder is the Midlands nation, which Woodard sees as the most quintessentially American region. It has a bizarre, gerrymander-like shape, with a center of gravity in Iowa, northern Missouri, eastern Nebraska, and northeastern Kansas and three narrow arms: one short, extending south then west to north Texas; one east to the Atlantic coast to separate Yankeedom from Greater Appalachia and Tidewater; and one to the north, separating Yankeedom from the Far West, then wrapping around the Canadian northern border of the Great Lakes.

Woodard sees some of these cultural nations as reliable allies, others as historical opponents, and others, like the Midlands, as swing voters. Greater Appalachia, Tidewater, and the Deep South, in particular, form a consistent alliance. Most of the cultural units recognized do not follow state boundaries, and some are so tiny that they could hardly survive as independent nations. The distinctions seen, like Garreau's, therefore don't predict the likely shape of successor nations, but may have some indirect influence on the fate of certain states.

"Okay, so where would *the dividing lines be?"*

Unfortunately, I don't know—and they might be influenced by the destination choices of people who move into the border states in the coming years, or move within them. (I suggest later that residents of the biggest, most disenfranchised cities in certain swing states could do both themselves, and later their states, a big favor by dispersing from those concentrated populations.) One sure thing is that many dividing lines can't follow those described by Garreau or Woodard, because the units being redistributed will almost certainly be entire states, unless the country so completely collapsed into chaos that state governments were lost. Following natural cultural or ecological boundaries would require many states to be split apart, which in most cases would mean loss for some state without corresponding gain, so that the state government would vigorously resist it. Therefore polities incorporating multiple subcultures will likely continue to exist.

A well-thought-out new book by journalist and novelist Stephen Marche, *The Next Civil War* (2022a), explores the possible descent of

the U.S. into civil war—which he considers highly likely at this point—by use of both copious facts and fictional scenarios. His vision of how the U.S. might ultimately break up seems like a useful starting point for discussion. Marche envisions four successor nations in the continental United States. Texas would become an independent nation, while California, Oregon and California would form Cascadia. A group of Northeastern states, including New England through Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia; Michigan; and Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois, would form "the United States," incorporating as it would most of the original 13 states. All the remainder would form what he labeled "the Republic of the United States": all the remaining western and Great Plains states, all of the southeast up to North Carolina, as well as Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, and West Virginia.

Since the Republic in particular would not be culturally, economically, or ecologically cohesive, evidently Marche presumes that the divisions between the latter two nations will be based on whether states are majority Red Tribe or Blue Tribe, and that all Red-dominated states or regions, except Texas, would choose to form a union. I am not sure he is correct about this. Though most of those states are GOP-dominated, they have diverse political cultures, the Southeast being more evangelical and the West more libertarian. The Southeast might form a revived Confederacy that the populations of some increasingly Blue and Hispanic southwestern states (Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona) would not wish to join. Even within the mountain West, the fairly Blue Colorado electorate might not be eager to join a republic centered on anti-environmental conservatism. It would seem to me that at least two segregate nations might better be formed from this broad geographic majority of the Continental U.S., and maybe three. However, it is also a consideration that some of those states currently have higher populations than they can *possibly* support long-term, so that some people will have to leave, and they may not support political decisions that could put militarized borders between them and a reasonable place of refuge.

On top of that, some of Utah's Latter-Day Saints dream of creating an independent racialized theocracy (Wilson 2021), and

certain other regions have many white nationalists who would object to any nation-state large enough to include cultural diversity such as that found in the Southwest. However, small ethnostates with no coastal access and meager water supplies would face a future of grinding poverty (comparable to that inflicted on Native American reservations with the same geographic characters). Political decisions made by Western states will depend upon the demographics and mood of the population at the time. Here I do not try to make predictions for the Western states, since I propose that people need to be moving out of that entire region, regardless of its political future.

The northeastern "United States" of Marche's vision is relatively small compared to the number of people who already live there, much less those who would hope to move there, and would be divided into three portions. One of those would have no land connection to the other two, which themselves would be connected only by the Mackinac Bridge connecting Mackinaw City, Michigan to that state's Upper Peninsula. That seems challenging, but since water transport will be cheaper than land transport anyway after the fossil fuel era, it might not be devastating.

Three of the largest included states, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, all of northeastern cultural affiliations, are under minority rule (Grose 2019), with the GOP holding most legislative seats and sometimes even enjoying a veto-proof supermajority. Those legislatures have enacted right-wing ideological priorities against most citizens' wishes and interests, so the fear might exist that they would force their states to join the Red union. This would be catastrophic for all involved: there would be immediate, widespread uprisings in those states, while the remainder of the Northeast would form small, geographically isolated territories, with New England probably facing the choice of immediate war for land or starvation. This might not happen even today. Since the prolonged violence that would follow would be entirely predictable, such choices would likely indicate a decision to pursue a campaign of ethnic cleansing within the state. They might hesitate to go that route, or a Constitutional amendment passed to institute or permit a peaceful breakup could specify that states' fates must be decided by referendum. However, if

residents have the time and ability to distribute themselves in such a way as to make the legislatures more representative (which I discuss later), it could certainly be avoided.

These states of Marche's core "United States" could likely feed themselves now if they had to, but it is also necessary to consider the distribution of the millions of people who will sooner or later seek to flee the western and coastal areas being devastated by climate change. Most of the people who are likely to leave soonest, while they still can, are urban, therefore mostly Blue. Most of these would probably prefer to go to the region where multiracial, secular democracy seems likely to persist. That region, as strictly defined by Marche, might not have the capacity to absorb so many people without skyrocketing costs of living today, and might find it quite difficult to produce food for the resulting populations if breakup prevented import of food from Breadbasket states.

It is therefore worth considering whether the boundaries of the Northeastern nation might plausibly be a little larger than Marche predicts. When dense populations in one place make life too expensive or difficult, people commonly start to move to peripheral areas nearby. If there are supposedly Red states bordering Marche's limited Northeast whose populations might actually, for whatever reason, be on or near the fence regarding their preferred future, and that now offer cheaper housing and likelier employment, some current or would-be Northeastern residents might consider it worth the risk of living there rather than in the "core" Northeastern states. In my opinion, there are several such states.

Three of the Southeastern states are now, if the *population's* preferences are considered, purple or sometimes light blue states, although that might not mean that they would turn their backs on longstanding cultural ties to Dixie. These are Virginia and North Carolina, which the Schwarzenegger Institute (Grose et al. 2019) highlights as among the worst-gerrymandered states (although Virginia recently had a Democratic-led government), and Georgia, whose Senate races went blue by a hair-thin margin in 2020 despite massive voter roll purges. If the GOP was in power when the Union broke up, residents would probably not be allowed to vote on their fate unless

there was an enforced federal mandate to that effect. (The continuing conflict over Kashmir, forced by elites to remain in India while most of its people would have preferred to be part of Pakistan, shows that that is a tragically short-sighted approach.) As Georgians would be geographically embedded within a future Confederacy, it is doubtful whether they would join a geographically distant Northeast. Virginia and North Carolina would more likely look north. However, as I note later, the availability of affordable housing and jobs in sustainable and potentially welcoming areas is limited in these states.

Iowa, the heart of what Colin Woodard recognizes as Midlander culture, could well become the southwestern limit of the Northeast. It has much more in common culturally and economically with Minnesota and Wisconsin than with the Far West, to say nothing of the Deep South. Iowa is conservative but pragmatic in character; it has been known for respect for education, honest politics, and active participatory democracy, though this may be changing. It is still a very white and mostly rural state, so efforts by current Republican leaders to make voting difficult may reflect a fear that the population isn't really as right-wing as they would like. My own personal wish is to retire to Iowa, which I would not do if I thought that it would end up in the Confederacy.

Two other states that are geographically and, in the past, culturally Northeastern but that now appear to be solidly Red are Indiana and Ohio. These states, to my eyes, have very different circumstances. The majority of Indiana's population is downstate, and has always been very conservative. Indiana as a whole would likely vote to join the Red union or Confederacy. However, the northern end of Indiana has densely populated Chicago metro-area communities, some of which are largely non-white and inclined to vote Blue. There might be an opportunity for a land swap that would see the Confederacy give the northern end of Indiana to Illinois as a land corridor to downstate Michigan, sacrificing access to Lake Michigan, but receiving in exchange a reliably Red portion of the southern end of Illinois, bringing valuable Mississippi and Ohio River ports. I would not recommend that liberals move to northern Indiana, however,

between the unlikelihood of this scenario and the fact that it is kind of a dump. (Sorry, Hoosiers!)

That leaves Ohio, which may be balanced on a knife edge. The southern, "Appalachian" part of the state is geographically smaller, but includes some of the state's several large metropolitan areas. Ohio has appeared reliably religious-conservative of late, its legislature passing very extreme anti-abortion laws, but it is also heavily gerrymandered. In 2018, when 17 of 33 state senate districts were on the ballot, the GOP won 58.8% of seats with only 47.2% of the votes (Grose 2019). It is hard to know which way this state might go if the population had a say in the matter. One cannot assume that even popularly supported Republican rule would lead automatically to a culturally northeastern state's joining the Confederacy. In terms of economic advantage, Garreau seems correct: this state should naturally flock with Pennsylvania as the center of a revived local manufacturing culture, not with Kentucky. However, I am not confident of that (see further discussion in Chapter 7).

"What about Native American reservations?"

Native American reservations, which legally have a nation-like status, are often located on the lands providing the least possible ecosystem services as it is. It's no secret that white colonists took the best lands, forcing Native Americans onto the poorer and drier land. White populations were far smaller then; America was growing and seemed able to grow forever. No white people really suffer because Native Americans are able to survive on those few meager lands, yet some still manage to find reason to resent their Native neighbors anyway. When resource flows, agricultural productivity, and the economy all start to contract, it's clear that some rural whites facing crop failures and poverty will look with jealous greed at nearby reservations and feel that if residents have *anything* at all, a single drop of water or oil, they deserve to take that by force.

In southern Oregon, an *L.A. Times* podcast reported (L.A. Times 2021), Upper Klamath Lake, which supplies water to the Klamath Tribes and to local white farmers, began to dry up in summer 2021 due to the drought. The Klamath must keep some water in the lake or

a fish that is economically and culturally important to them could not spawn and would be wiped out. “Every spring the farmers wait to hear from the federal government about how much water they will get,” reporter Anita Chabria explained, and when they get less than they want, they believe that “the government is stealing their water.” Twenty years ago, a group of farmers stole water from the lake when they did not get what they wanted. The tribe has senior rights to the water, so supplies to the farmers were cut off in 2021, following the law. In response, right-wing militia, encouraged by radical leader Ammon Bundy, set up a camp at the lake and threatened to bring in a crane and open gates to take the water for the white farmers by force.

Most Native nations are neither populous nor heavily armed, and most live on land that is hard to defend. If the federal government that sometimes ensures their treaty rights are sort of respected vanishes or abandons that task, Native Americans, especially in the arid west, may be at serious risk and should start considering how to protect their interests. It would be smarter for white people to admit that they have been incapable of managing these lands for long-term survivability and invite the Native peoples, who had recently had a much better track record, to take charge of economic and environmental policies. Don’t hold your breath waiting for that to happen! However, Native groups who have managed to preserve some of their traditional knowledge are more likely to survive with some dignity than the majority population, and perhaps some of the majority will be intelligent enough to pay attention and learn from them.

Chapter 4: Where Are the Danger Zones?

As we have seen, the entire world is facing problems due to the collision of skyrocketing population and consumption with falling global resources and increasing pollution costs. Many parts of the U.S. will suffer directly from climate change, but even the lucky places that see relatively little climate disruption will find their economic arrangements more and more affected by what is happening to everyone else. Thus, there are no really *safe* zones.

However, there are definitely *less safe* zones. The U.S. Global Change Research Program's (2018) *Climate Report*, Day and Hall's (2016) analysis of regional economic dependencies and climate effects on water and sea level in *America's Most Sustainable Cities and Regions*, and Julie Kurtz et al.'s (2020) present-day foodshed mapping generally point in the same directions. While the latter two suggest that any large, densely populated urban areas are questionably sustainable, three regions are particularly problematic due to the severity of the problems they will face and the huge numbers of people involved. These are the Southwest, southern Florida, and the highly urbanized eastern coasts. Unfortunately, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), all of these regions are continuing to grow in population. All of them are virtually certain to see serious problems, but the Southwest is likely to be first. In fact, it has passed its tipping point into crisis and the disasters are already beginning.

The entire southwestern quarter of the United States, from western Texas up to the southwestern corner of Oklahoma and west to the Pacific coast, including all or almost all of the Four Corners states, Nevada, and California, is expected to face severe disruptions. Continued warming in this region appears increasingly likely to result in a long-lasting "megadrought", in which what we now think

of as extreme drought conditions and heat waves become commonplace. The last time this region faced a centuries-long hot and dry period, in the precolonial era, it resulted in starvation, warfare, and the outright collapse of a culture that was far more modest in size and consumption habits than ours. Experts on historical climate determined that the worst period of 12th-century drought "far exceeded the severity, duration, and extent" of any drought seen in the post-colonial era (Woodhouse et al. 2010), although the high temperatures at the peak of that drought were not as high as those already created by climate change.

We have already been seeing inexorable increases in droughts and heat waves. As of August 24, 2021, the U.S. Drought Monitor (National Drought Mitigation Center 2021) reported that 23.51% of the Western region (including Montana and New Mexico, but not Wyoming or Colorado) was in "exceptional" drought. Over 98% of the region was at least "abnormally dry" and almost 95% experiencing some level of drought, with 60.68% in "extreme or exceptional" drought. A few years ago we were being told that droughts in the area were the worst in centuries; the 2021 drought was worse than those. Although some heavy rains were seen in the following winter, they are quite unlikely to represent a lasting change in the overall trend towards greater drought. Another critical point is that the Drought Monitor estimates the human population in the areas affected by drought at over 60 million.

Fossil fuels gave us the necessary resources to build, water, and power cities in desert or near-desert regions that are far larger than the Ancestral Pueblo could have imagined. The Los Angeles megalopolis is the biggest of these, but other major cities including Phoenix and Las Vegas are also threatened. Water supplies for these cities and for other uses, such as irrigated agriculture and manufacturing, can be predicted to decline as climate change progresses. The two major reservoirs created by damming of the Colorado River, Lake Powell and Lake Mead, are running dry. The former is created by Glen Canyon Dam; the latter, farther downstream and at lower elevation, is created by the Hoover Dam. Both had water levels at historic lows in 2021, with Lake Mead almost two-thirds empty and

Lake Powell three-quarters empty, the lowest it has ever been since it was filled.

The Guardian (McGivney 2021) reported that in July 2021, Lake Powell had a record low water level of 3554 feet, at which level it was three-quarters empty. This was ruinous for the local economy, with tourism businesses, such as houseboat rentals, being left literally high and dry. (The water level when full is 3700 feet. For those who aren't familiar with montane reservoirs, the level of the surface of the water is measured as elevation above sea level, not elevation above the bottom of the reservoir.) On March 16, 2022, the level had dropped below 3525 feet (Metz and Fonseca, 2022). For the first time, a water shortage on the Colorado River has been declared, which will result, in 2022, in cuts to the water Arizona, Nevada, and Mexico will receive (Naishadham 2021).

As for the even larger Lake Mead, an online graph tracking Lake Mead levels, created by Paul Lutus (2017) based on monthly U.S. government data, shows that the level declined sharply from over 1210 feet in 2000 to little over 1080 feet in 2011. During the next few years, the level rebounded slightly but then retreated to a bumpy plateau around 1080 for several years and in 2021 declined below 1070 feet, triggering a declaration of shortage. It is now above two-thirds empty. Continuing or, worse, escalating drought could allow further rapid declines in future, unless water supplies are cut severely to maintain lake levels. Moreover, if Lake Powell were to drop too low, to the so-called "deadpool" level, it could become impossible to release water through Glen Canyon Dam to replenish Lake Mead (Metz and Fonseca 2022).

So far urbanites and farmers in California, which has senior water rights, have largely been asked nicely to conserve (and they're not doing a very good job of that!), while a few who are directly affected by the physical reality of the situation, like Lake Powell houseboat owners, get hit hard. The drying up of these huge lakes has been devastating tourism-based businesses, with boats unable to enter and leave the lake using boat ramps that no longer reach the water. But the far bigger concern is the tens of millions of people who depend

upon these critically important reservoirs for farming, industry, or drinking water.

Reporting by *The Guardian* (Singh 2021) laid out the next steps for Lake Mead: The water level, which would be about 1221 feet above sea level when completely full, triggered tier 1 water restrictions, which hit primarily Arizona farmers, when it dropped below 1075 feet. Tier 2 restrictions will be imposed after the level drops below 1050 feet, and are expected by 2023, unless 2022 is an unusually wet year. Whenever that happens, farmers in states with junior water rights will be hit much harder. (If you live in one of those states but aren't worried because you aren't a farmer and can afford food imported from elsewhere, you may have noticed that when farmers fail economically, especially when it can be blamed on government action, support for political extremism increases.) At 1025 feet, tier 3 restrictions would reduce supplies to cities and Native American reservations.

Lake Mead's original intakes are at 1000 feet, meaning that when the lake dropped below that level they could not supply water. A third intake was tunneled into the center of the lake at 860 feet to supply Las Vegas with drinking water so long as any water at all was left; that represents the last-drop level. Since the bottom of a reservoir (formerly a river canyon) is narrower than the top, a layer ten feet deep of water at the top contains much more water than the ten feet nearest the bottom. Therefore, the amount of water that must be consumed to reduce the reservoir from 1050 to 1025 feet is less than the amount consumed to reduce it from 1075 to 1050. The more the level drops, the faster it could drop in future—unless consumption is forcibly restrained.

A continuing future of less precipitation in the Southwest, hotter temperatures, and less snowpack will mean less water entering the reservoirs. If a historic period of drought is in the near-term future, Lakes Mead and Powell will never be replenished fully nor for long. Instead, even if an occasional wet year raises the water level, they will continue usually to decline in volume. Great political pressure will be placed on their managers to maintain water allocations to both populous cities and the politically powerful and economically

important farming sector, but there simply will not be enough water to meet everyone's needs.

Communities that are not fed by those reservoirs or other freshwater sources often depend upon other sources that will become less reliable in drought. Groundwater in some areas is already becoming less reliable, because it too is replenished by rainfall and snowmelt that are lacking in droughts. For example, the tourism-dependent town of Mendocino, California has already been forced to purchase water delivered by truck, as its wells ran dry.

Most of the West is too dry, without irrigation, for agriculture other than livestock grazing. Bridget Scanlon and colleagues (2012) analyzed the sustainability of irrigation in key western regions. While irrigation with freshwater from surface sources is threatened by drought, 60% of American irrigation comes from groundwater sources. Much of the Great Plains draws water from the huge Ogallala Aquifer, which in its southern portion is "fossil water" that is no longer substantially replenished through rainfall. California's bountifully productive but naturally dry Central Valley is also underlaid by a large aquifer that provides pumped water. Scanlon et al. concluded that there were centuries' worth of water left in both aquifers considered as a whole, but that depletion was patchy, both regionally and more locally. Some localities could start running out of groundwater within the next few decades. Meanwhile, two large aquifers in California proper, Lakes Shasta and Oroville, are also seeing their levels plummeting. Both of these have been an important water supply for California farmers, and both are being forced to slash their outputs (Singh 2022).

The wildfire season in the West is already longer and more severe than in the past, with the destruction of whole towns despite heroic firefighting efforts increasingly common: most recently, as of this writing, Lytton, British Columbia, and Greenville, California. During the last megadrought, much more of the Southwest was desertified. Conversion of a forested area to a desert or semidesert will probably involve the burning of most of the forest, sooner or later. Drier foliage in hotter weather burns more easily. If the trees avoid fire long enough to die of drought, they become standing dry fuel easily

ignited by lightning. The fact that traditional Native American forest management practices, which resulted in forests that could better survive fires, were suppressed long ago doesn't help.

With hotter and drier forests, forest fires may continue to worsen until most of the forest is gone in large parts of both the Southwest and Northwest. The affected states certainly will try to control fires, but already the longer fire season and larger fires are putting a strain on firefighters and firefighting resources. It is all too easy to imagine a scenario in which there might be more fires threatening populated areas than can be fought at once.

Long-term severe drought will have other consequences. Increases in extreme summer heat, as well as particulate air pollution from fires, will worsen health, cause deaths, and shorten life expectancy. If the two great Colorado River reservoirs drop too low, their dams will be unable to generate hydropower; however, they supply a small fraction of the region's electricity so it is not clear how disruptive its loss would really be. Economically, much employment in the Southwest depends on non-essential economic sectors (e.g., tourism, gambling, and entertainment) that are vulnerable to economic decline occurring regionally, nationally, and/or globally. A California farmer who has lost his almond trees because he couldn't get water for them will not be vacationing in Vegas that year.

Day and Hall (2016) considered the entire Southwest, including the large areas that are rural and sparsely populated, to be at extreme risk for climate disruption. Their grim conclusion was: "The current human population of the Southwest is probably just too large ... and systemic failure in the region seems likely." If you live in that region, you should memorize that sentence and contemplate it daily for a few weeks—assuming that systemic failure is not already in progress by the time you are able to read these words, a possibility that seems increasingly likely.

The second of the most unsustainable regions, though its problems are not quite so imminent, are the parts of the southeastern coast at lowest elevation, primarily southern Florida and southern Louisiana. Southern Florida is a bigger crisis because the population density and

value of at-risk infrastructure are much greater, but southern Louisiana is also worth paying attention to for its potentially devastating environmental and cultural effects.

The southern end of Florida, including some land further up along the eastern coast, is very flat land at a very low elevation. Large portions would be underwater after five meters (less than 17 feet) of sea level rise (NASA, 2004), and the vast majority of the area is less than ten meters (ca.33 feet) above sea level. Important coastal cities including Miami, Naples, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach are even lower in elevation, with much of their land only one to three meters (3 to 10 feet) above sea level, as are many smaller communities that now derive much income from the tourism and retirement industries.

The relatively small sea level rise we've seen so far is mostly due to the fact that warmer water takes up slightly more space than colder water, just as hot air takes up much more space than cold air (stick a balloon in the freezer for an example). Increasingly, though, the melting of glaciers around the world directly or indirectly adds water to the oceans. A major research consortium studying ice melt in Greenland recently reported that ice loss had been close to the "high-warming" scenario of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IMBIE Team 2020). That report was released little over a year before *rain* fell on the highest point in the central ice sheet for the first time ever recorded. As time passes, more and more of Greenland's ice will become the Atlantic Ocean's water. The West Antarctica ice sheet is in a similar condition.

So far, only a minute fraction of those two ice sheets has melted, and their contribution to observed sea level rise is measured in millimeters. However, either of them would raise sea level by several meters if it melted completely. Glaciologists who do not think we have already triggered literally unstoppable melting of these ice sheets think that that outcome could be avoided if we all, the entire planet, quickly stopped increasing the carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere. Sad to say, it appears that that will be politically and culturally impossible (except in one circumstance—a global thermonuclear war followed by nuclear winter—which we can only

hope the Powers That Be are not contemplating as an alternative to runaway global warming). Therefore, in the long run, substantial sea level rise will be effectively unavoidable. Much of southern Florida, including the Everglades and the region's largest cities, can be expected to cease to exist as a land mass in the climate-change future.

Local authorities are far from accepting this dire verdict. Political leaders in Miami-Dade county encourage more inland building and elevating roads and houses with fill (Flavelle and Mazzei 2021). The Army Corps of Engineers proposes a six-billion-dollar, six-mile-long, 20-foot-high seawall, but it would only protect downtown and, significantly, the financial district (Rhode-Barbarigos and Haus 2021). For political reasons an effort may be made to save Miami for a while, but it is hard to imagine our declining and tax-phobic society building enough infrastructure to hold back the ocean from the entire southern end of Florida, or maintaining it even as fossil fuel supplies decline.

Even if that could be done, because the rock under this land and the surrounding sea floor is porous limestone, salt water would permeate it and seep up through the rock, polluting freshwater supplies. This is already happening today (e.g., Fitterman 2014), as is flooding at high tides in which seawater is forced up through sewers into the streets, which would surely be worsened if those streets were actually below the new sea level. Coastal flooding is becoming more frequent not only in Florida, but in other coastal regions (NOAA 2021). Much greater flooding is predicted in future; for example, NOAA (2021) predicts four to seven high-tide flood days for Virginia Beach, in the Miami area, in 2021, but 10 to 55 such flood days in 2050.

According to typical predictions of how long major sea level rise will take, even the lowest-lying coastal cities have several decades yet before they could be inundated, and the higher land farther inland will have centuries. However, quality of life and access to uncontaminated water for human and agricultural use will decline long before the land goes completely underwater. Housing values should decline in parallel to this trend, or in advance of it as buyers foresee the future to come. As usual, as these crises progress, elite members of

society are likely to focus more on preserving their privilege than the basic health and economic security of the poorer classes. There is also reason at this point to wonder whether projections for the melting of Greenland and West Antarctica could prove to be as conservative as the projections regarding future heat waves and floods. Things might get worse faster than expected.

Except, again, possibly in the event of a nuclear winter, southern Florida *cannot* be saved in the long term. While bits of the coastline of New York or South Carolina or many other states will someday be lost, this whole area will entirely cease to exist, and will then likely be underwater for millennia. Tragically—for the region harbors a vibrant human culture as well as beautiful scenery and unique ecology—it has no long-term future. Nobody should move there and add to the problem, and younger people who own homes there should strongly consider moving away while there are still suckers willing to buy them.

Southern Louisiana is in a similar predicament for somewhat different reasons. It is losing land at a far faster rate than Florida, not because the sea is rising but because the low, flat coastal land is sinking. Heavy fossil fuel extraction has caused subsidence, and human control of the Mississippi River prevents the region of the delta from being built up by regular inundations of silt as would have happened in the past. Additionally, wetland forests that used to prevent coastal erosion have been destroyed. As a result, well over 1800 square miles of Louisiana land have already been lost in less than a century, and loss of another 2250 square miles in the next 50 years is predicted (Colten 2018). Don't forget, also, that southern Louisiana is the home of "Cancer Alley." Its political domination by chemical and fossil fuel companies, which are already killing its people without consequence, will ensure that future flooding carries a heavy load of poisons. Sadly, it is also the home of a rich, unique local culture, which will be highly threatened as the environmental situation worsens.

The third most unsustainable part of America is the entirety of the heavily urbanized band along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the

United States, most of which, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), is still gaining population at the expense of inland, more sustainable regions. Portions—sometimes large portions—of major coastal cities including Boston, the New York megalopolis, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Norfolk, Charleston, Jacksonville, Tampa, and New Orleans will be underwater or regularly flooded within a few more meters of sea level rise, as would many smaller communities. As noted above, a few more meters of sea level rise is virtually certain to happen sooner or later. Thus, trillions of dollars' worth of coastal real estate and infrastructure will someday go underwater, unless possessed by communities rich enough to build seawalls and inflict floods on their less wealthy neighbors instead, and its value will plummet decades earlier, when every significant storm comes to mean a foot of water in the streets.

This may be compared to drought in the Southwest in two critically important ways. (1) It isn't only predictions from computer modeling; it's happening *now*. The U.S. Global Change Research Program, in their 2014 assessment, reported that between 1958 and 2012, the percentage of precipitation that fell as "very heavy events" increased in the Northeastern region by 71%, far higher than in any other region. New York City was recently inundated by severe flooding after so-called 1-in-200-year rainfall from Hurricane Ida (Kahn 2021). (2) It will get worse, maybe much worse. What was 1-in-200-year rainfall before climate change will be much more frequent in future. Warmer air holds more moisture, and warmer ocean water spawns stronger hurricanes. Unless something changes soon, we've seen less than half, perhaps much less than half, of the temperature changes that we're causing. Recall that the IPCC says the more the temperature rises, the faster the number of extreme *or unprecedented* events will rise. That means that we will see not just more very strong hurricanes than we are used to, but someday, hurricanes stronger than we have ever seen before.

Other cities near sea level, such as Houston, will be ever more susceptible to devastating floods as stronger hurricanes combine with higher tides. Flooding will become a greater problem in all coastal cities, not just the lowest-lying. NOAA (2021) predicts, for example,

that high-tide flood days in Boston (whose official elevation is over 100 feet above sea level) will increase from 11 in 2020 to somewhere between 45 and 95 in 2050; the record to date was 22. This would be burdensome and costly to say the least.

Moreover, a recent report in *The Nation* (Lindorff 2021) highlighted that, though there is no complete database of American landfills or their contents, probably close to 50,000 landfills are located along coasts. Prof. Noah Sachs, interviewed for the report, noted that coastal landfills are "typically located in places which couldn't be used for anything else, because they are low-lying, water-soaked, or flood-prone." Many older landfills are unlined, though clay and plastic liners will eventually break if subjected to enough stress from flooding, and many contain dangerous industrial chemicals or radioactive waste, which may not be documented anywhere, much less publicly. Rising seas will flood these landfills and pollute the waters encroaching on many communities with chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects or congenital disabilities, and other health problems.

In most places, there will in theory be room for residents to move a little inland or to higher ground. Perhaps New Yorkers are pictured as continuing to go about their business, living above the first floor, abandoning flooded subways, and walking to work in wading boots, as the fun Rutger Hauer movie *Split Second* depicted people doing in post-global-warming London. One difficulty, of course, is that the rich would rapidly acquire higher-elevation domiciles for themselves as the need arises, leaving the most flood-prone housing to the poor and working classes, and vigorously resist any efforts to redistribute housing stock so that the victims are able to relocate.

If all of these cities wished to build seawalls sufficient to protect themselves (while destroying smaller neighboring communities by forcing water in their direction), from where would the resources come, either the financial resources or the physical supplies and energy required? Neither as individual communities, nor as a nation will we have the available resources to build infrastructure to hold off the entire Atlantic Ocean, even if the alternative is economic disruptions and losses that ultimately cost the country even more than the hypothetical cost of the infrastructure.

If a national Manhattan Project-like response is dreamed of, let's not forget the problem of political polarization. Those cities may hold a large fraction of the nation's population but they are represented by a small fraction of the Senate, which is increasingly dominated by rural Republicans who explicitly identify residents of those cities as *not Real Americans* and claim or perhaps even believe that their states receive an unfairly large share of federal services. Those senators won't raise their constituents' taxes to help New Orleans, or Baltimore, or New York City. And indeed they might be wise not to, if climate change will continue to progress in future centuries so that the gigantic infrastructure we might build to hold off the 2120 ocean would be overwhelmed long before 2220.

Therefore disruptions to business as usual may be expected for any coastal community. The mega-cities have the additional problem that they are heavily reliant on long-distance shipments of food and other goods. Especially in the Northeastern region and southern Florida, there is not enough farmland and pasture in the states surrounding the big cities to feed their populations (Kurtz et al. 2020). Constant shipments of food from other regions or continents are necessary to provision a megalopolis, to say nothing of large-scale imports of finished goods such as clothing, shoes, furniture, medical products, etc., which are no longer commonly produced in American cities for local use, as they once were.

Receiving such shipments requires that climate change or resource crises do not severely disrupt the production or shipping of the goods (e.g., vegetables grown in California's irrigation-dependent Central Valley); that climate disasters do not disrupt the ability to receive shipments, e.g., by destroying bridges or closing ports; that local businesses continue to have adequate funds and access to credit to buy the goods; and that trade is not cut off because of political conflicts or war. As of this writing, many industries are suffering from prolonged supply chain disruptions due to a pandemic that, compared to many historical examples, has been relatively mild. As climate change and resource depletion bite harder, reducing agricultural yields and increasing the price of both produce and fuel to transport it, the ability to keep complicated and lengthy supply chains working

smoothly may further decline, as may the ability of poorly-paid or unemployed city dwellers to pay for the goods on which they are dependent.

Day and Hall (2016) presume that all areas with large urban populations will face these kinds of sustainability problems. While they evaluate the eastern coastal areas as a most-threatened red zone because of the additional impacts of sea level rise, hurricanes, and economic disruption, they also depict the entire Great Lakes region, ranging from Chicago to Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Rochester, most of Michigan, and the eastern half of Wisconsin, extending southwest to St. Louis, as dark orange, meaning a hot spot for unsustainability. The primary rationale seems to be that the region has many fairly large cities.

However, cities in the western two-thirds of that region are surrounded by enough crop and pasture land that Kurtz et al. (2020) calculated that by adopting a less meat-heavy, 20% omnivorous diet, the metropolitan areas could be fully provisioned from farms within 250 km (150 miles) or less. That includes the Chicago metro area, which despite its large population is located near enough of the world's most productive farmland that locavorism could be feasible. Even if agricultural productivity in the inland regions declines somewhat, these regions should usually have enough to feed their populations. By contrast, Kurtz et al. found that very large populations in coastal areas with little agriculture—New York, Los Angeles, Miami—would have to draw food supplies from a radius of at least 500 to 1000 km, or even more than that given today's meat-rich diet. The sheer size and complexity of the supply chain required represents a real vulnerability.

There is a widespread cultural tradition in America that values the countryside and disdains cities, going back at least to Thomas Jefferson's vision of America as a land of yeoman farmers (with occasional slave labor...). Survivalists have been threatening us for at least several decades that within a year or two, everyone living in cities will deservingly *diieeee!* or *staaaarve to death!* because of TEOTWAWKI or when TSHTF unless they rush to move to an all-

white rural community with lots of gold, guns, and ammo. But these fantasies and delusions aren't confined to the ultraright; in the Sixties, a lot of hippies thought (briefly) that setting up rural communes to live off the land would be preferable to living in cities and working half as hard. Cities have been around for a long time, and some have been sustainable enough to last for millennia. Therefore if I claim that today's coastal megacities are really too big to go on as they are, I have to offer an explanation for why that is more true now than in the past, to make sure that you don't suspect I'm one of those people just assuming that anyplace where you can't find a cow barn within walking distance is *too big*.

A critical indicator of the sustainability of a city is housing prices. First, let's note that housing standards vary over time, and ours have become artificially inflated. Most urban and rural housing used to be cheap but horrible. City zoning codes first sought to prohibit housing so crowded and squalid as to pose high risks of epidemic disease or fire. Later, they began to prohibit housing modest or just small enough to suggest poverty in a culture that places great importance on the appearance of wealth. (If the kitchen counter in the new house you want to build is required to have an electrical outlet every 18", it privileges as the norm a lifestyle that uses a lot of gadgets and electricity.) Someone who wants to build a small cottage that would have been fine in 1950 can't get a mortgage or even, in many cities, a building permit. People who want alternatives such as composting toilets or natural wall materials may have to fight for it for years.

When getting permission to build a domicile requires the use of methods that require professional expertise and lots of money, banks and developers have great control over what gets built, and what they want is maximum profits. In recent decades, single-room occupancy housing has been nearly obliterated because more profit can be made by building luxury apartments that house fewer people on the same land. Our houses and apartments are larger and at least look "nicer" than those of our ancestors, and so they cost more.

However, that pressure towards nicer-looking and costlier housing began in America's post-war imperial period, when the country was wealthier every year, the rich paid taxes, and even most of the

working classes were relatively prosperous. Most full-time workers then could afford housing in their communities. This should always be the case. "Market failure" happens in real life quite frequently, but housing is a critical good. You would expect that if most people in a town can only afford $500 rent, but developers only build apartments that rent for $1000, they will have trouble finding tenants and eventually will be forced to either slash rents or build less fancy housing. Just as a job that pays less money per week than you must spend to eat for a week can't be sustained, a community that lacks housing that its residents are able to live in can't be sustained.

Unfortunately, that market failure is a widespread reality in America. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition (2021) reports that on average, a full-time American worker now needs to earn an hourly wage of $24.90 to afford a two-bedroom rental home without excessive cost burden, whereas barely over 40% of workers make that much money. Worse yet, "In only 218 counties out of more than 3,000 nationwide can a full-time worker earning the minimum wage afford a one-bedroom rental home [house or apartment] at the Fair Market Rent." So Americans are already facing a housing crisis, one that has been and will continue to be worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But this crisis is not evenly distributed. The more demand there is for a scarce good, such as housing in a geographically limited area, the more the price can be raised. Because of the geographic mobility and great wealth of our upper classes (and increasingly of foreign upper classes), people and money flood into the most desirable areas to live, bidding the price of housing up, and up, and up to a point that no working-class person can afford. Over a decade ago, visiting a pleasant part of California, I was horrified to see that typical houses listed for sale in the newspaper, not mansions but modest-sized bungalows, mostly cost $2 million and up. A few asking only $1 million were billed as "starter homes." One middle-aged scientist who worked in that area spent four hours per day commuting from a cheaper area. The situation is probably worse now, as the investor class is snapping up an ever-increasing share of the housing stock nationwide.

In New York City in 2021, the median monthly rent for a *one*-bedroom apartment was $2570 (Chen 2021). At that rate, you have to make $31,000 a year, after taxes, solely to pay the rent, without even considering food, health care, child care, clothing, transportation, or any utilities not covered by the landlord. That's insane. Salaried people in New York offices are usually paid well by national standards, but how are the folks who pour their lattes and mop their floors supposed to survive? If there are so many people in a city that working-class people and students can't afford basic housing, then that city has gotten too big for its own good, period.

City infrastructure will also become a bigger issue, the bigger the population is. A population of ten million people needs to draw food and water from a much larger area than a population of 100,000. They may have greater population density and smaller residences, so that less electricity, natural gas, street repair, etc. are needed *per capita*, but the overall quantity of these goods and services that must be provided to a single area is huge. Much more infrastructure is required to safely dispose of so many people's sewage and garbage, and a failure of those systems can become catastrophic faster. Air pollution is also commonly worse because of the density of sources of pollution, and mostly disposed of through filtering by residents' lungs, where it causes many chronic diseases: not just the well-documented heart disease and lung cancer, but, according to mounting evidence, Alzheimer's disease in the old and reduced cognitive abilities in children (e.g., Kilian and Kitazawa 2018).

With a huge tax base, if reasonable taxation is politically feasible, it is currently possible for a big city to take measures to protect itself from climate crises and resource depletion. But when crises and depletion do bite, the local scale of the problems will be correspondingly bigger. More electrical capacity blacked out at once, or more homes damaged by a hurricane or flooding, or more daily traffic needing to cross a bridge that's past its life expectancy and that nobody wants to spend the money to rebuild. As decline progresses, the costs of fixing problems may seem so huge that they are not fixed, or they are fixed at the cost of letting other basic serv-

ices or infrastructure maintenance slide, so that dysfunction will inexorably increase.

There is another specific problem with large cities: the urban heat island effect once so beloved of people who were being paid to cast doubt on climate change research. Within a metropolitan area, surface temperatures can vary by up to 10°C (about 18°F!; Shandas et al. 2019), even though the whole area is experiencing the same general climate or weather system. City landscapes with vast amounts of concrete and asphalt hold more heat than a landscape with smaller buildings and more trees and green space, and additional waste heat is generated by human activities.

This problem is worse for people in poorer neighborhoods, who get fewer and smaller green spaces, more pavement, and denser populations. Hoffman et al. (2020) studied over 100 urban areas and found that on average, areas formerly redlined (denied mortgages or insurance because residents were non-white) were 2.6°C warmer than non-redlined areas. There was considerable geographic variation, with relatively little effect seen in the Midwest, much more in the Southeast and West: up to 7°C hotter in redlined areas compared to non-redlined areas of the same city.

Before climate change, the urban heat island effect meant less pleasant summers for city folks, especially those in crowded neighborhoods (leading to more ill temper and violence, at least up to a point), but milder winters. It was seldom directly life-threatening except to the elderly and sickly. Now, it could much more frequently mean death from heat stroke, literally cooking alive in one of those record-shattering heat waves; an extra 10°F inflicted by the built environment is enough to turn a heat wave from miserable to deadly. Most of the victims of the 2021 Pacific Northwest heat dome seem to have been urbanites. Especially if your means are modest, so that in a costly big city you have to or would have to live in one of those crowded neighborhoods, this is something to consider. Every community in America *might* experience life-threatening effects of climate change, such as tornadoes or monsoon-like rains in unexpected places; communities that certainly *will* do so sooner or later, and perhaps almost every summer, may be less desirable homes.

We might also think in broader terms about the development of cities and where our hyperurbanization has led us. Because any reasonably organized city is too densely populated to produce most of its own food, cities are inherently dependent on the surrounding countryside for resources (food, fuel, fiber for clothing) extracted from nature or agriculture. They are only possible because farmers have a surplus, which they send to the city either because they wish to trade it for resources available from the city, such as manufactured goods, specialized services, or fertilizer material, or because the local government forces them to hand it over as taxes or tribute. The more surplus each farmer can produce and trade or sell, the more people can live in cities and specialize in economic activities other than farming. (Remember, complexity is correlated with net energy per capita.)

In the early days of agriculture, done with hand labor and draft animals, and with highly bred plant varieties and sophisticated organic farming methods unheard of, each farm family was able to produce little more than they needed to support themselves and the local rulers. For every family living in a city, there had to be several farm families whose surplus supplied their food and fiber. In the early 20th century in America, with better techniques and some mechanical devices, about a quarter of the population lived on farms, providing most of the food for the other three-quarters of the population. By the year 2000, only about 3.19 million people in America, 1% of the population, were employed as farmers (including unpaid family members) or farm laborers (USDA ERS 2020). A single American grain farmer, using huge machines made and powered with fossil fuels, can now produce enough calories to feed hundreds of people (or, more often, cows than then feed people).

This extraordinary post-Green Revolution productivity not only *enabled* the vast majority of Americans to abandon farms for cities; it effectively *required* them to. And most farmers want it that way, no matter what hostility they may voice towards soft-handed city-zens. If yields per unit of labor were half what they are today, then twice as many farmers would be necessary to produce the same amount of

food, and more people would stay in rural areas to farm. But surely few farmers wish that their productivity would plummet, even if that might revitalize their small towns!

Contrarily, what would happen if more people farmed in the present high-productivity era? Most land that's really good for farming is already being farmed, increasingly by very large landowners (since those giant tractors only make sense if you have a lot of field to plow). But suppose that a few million more new farmers could bring much more land under productive cultivation, flooding the market with far more corn and soybeans. Prices on those commodities, already often so low that farmers barely break even, would decline further. Farmers surely wouldn't want that, either. Even less would they want the percentage of the population who are able to farm to be increased by the redistribution of the huge acreages of farmland owned by corporations or individual rich men.

A parallel might be drawn to the British Enclosure Act in the early industrial era, which stripped peasant farmers of access to land, forcing them to move to squalid cities where they would be captive labor for factory owners. In the late 20th century, America's subsidization of highly mechanized farming, coercion to "get big or get out", and deliberate campaign to take land away from hundreds of thousands of African-American farmers combined to force millions of rural residents who could no longer live as farmers to move to cities where they might find jobs. Towns and cities are where providers of specialty services, such as medicine, are trained and work. They used also to be centers of manufacturing; while there has always been long-distance trade in luxury goods or regional specialties, most basic goods were made in numerous communities for local or regional sale. But there is little manufacture of that sort in most cities now. Plentiful fossil fuels have made it "more efficient" to manufacture goods in huge quantities at a central location and ship them great distances. In late stage global capitalism, the goods are made more cheaply, and corporate profits increased, by outsourcing the manufacture from anywhere in this nation to factories in poorer countries whose people can't demand what Americans consider a minimal wage.

Therefore, far fewer urban Americans now have the option to work in a factory, which, for all its downsides, had at one time provided many less educated people with a decent wage. Most urban jobs in America today are service jobs such as retail and fast food, corporate office jobs, or things like phone sales and ruthlessly exploitative "gig work" that didn't even exist until recently. As cities grew larger, the number of residents employed in less essential service jobs had to increase. A city only needs so many teachers, doctors and nurses, police and firefighters, auto mechanics, accountants, grocery clerks, trash collectors, and so forth. Throw in those whose work caters to residents' felt emotional needs: brewers and bartenders, ministers and therapists, even tattoo artists and sex workers. How are the remaining adults not employed in even semi-essential professions to survive? By necessity, they take jobs or start businesses in non-essential fields: catering to tourism, working in casinos or in stores selling stuff nobody really needs, serving as nail techs or giving fish pedicures, playing video games on the internet for money. Or they become petty bureaucrats.

Naturally, there are many intermediate categories of labor that are not strictly essential, but far from frivolous. Most past civilizations, so far as we know, had no such art form as the novel, but we wouldn't say that ours would suffer no loss if nobody ever worked as a writer again. And nobody should feel free to sneer at the nail techs. They are supporting themselves in the best way they can given the range of jobs for which their skills and credentials give them any hope of competing. The problem for them is that in hard times, a specialty service that could easily be foregone by almost all of its customers will lose income much faster than a more essential business. (For most face-to-face businesses, how long they were shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic may provide a rough estimate of how essential—or not—they were perceived to be.) Smaller cities, with smaller and less wealthy populations, can support fewer luxury services. There are also fewer jobs in general in smaller cities, but if you can get one, the likelihood that it will be providing a service residents consider valuable enough to pay for in tough times is probably greater.

Government officials such as police, social workers, inspectors, etc. are more numerous in urban areas, both because densely populated areas have more need to keep a rein on behavior that can harm others and because a larger tax base can support a greater diversity of bureaucrats. This can reduce citizens' quality of life. Bigger cities generally have more crime per capita, so they need more police, but more policing can make residents who face biased policing less safe and more stressed, damaging their health.

Militarization of the police has increased greatly in the last thirty years, between transfers of military equipment, military-style combat training, and coerced hiring preferences for veterans. These send the message to urban police in particular that their role is like that of an occupying army. The occupied "hostiles" are to be met with outrage and violence if they assert a right to influence the rules of engagement, and if a few civilians who can't be smeared as insurgents get shot, that's tolerable collateral damage. It's easier for police to adopt this attitude when virtually all of the citizens they encounter are strangers to them. White Americans have usually shown little concern for taxpayer-funded violence when it was directed at Black and brown people, but it's getting to the point where even white parents who think of calling 911 over an autistic child's temper tantrum had better think twice if they *like* the kid (e.g., Associated Press 2020). The brutal small-town sheriff is a classical American stereotype based on real examples, but most of the really egregious recent police killings of random innocent men and maimings of journalists have been reported from cities.

Edwards et al. (2021) recently reported that in the 20 most populous US counties, the median rate of children's contact with Child Protective Services was 41.3%. They discovered great racial inequities, with a minimum of 43% to a maximum of 72% of *all* Black children in a county being subjected to CPS contact, and with minority children much more likely to be taken from families. Maricopa County, the location of Phoenix, AZ, whose fundamental environmental problems we have already seen, was said to have "uniquely high rates of late-stage CPS interventions." However, in every one of the 20 largest counties, they found that the rate of CPS

contact was over 20% for white as well as Black and Hispanic children. When you hear a horror story about a mother being arrested or having her children dragged away because she allowed a school-aged child to bicycle to school or walk alone to a park, it's probably from a suburban or urban area. Small-town cops aren't usually that stupid.

So, while I argued that Chicago is far more sustainable than New York City, the implication is not "If you now live in New York City, you should move to Chicago." Any city the size of the Chicago metropolitan area is a phenomenon of the fossil fuel era. With our huge populations, urbanization rates, and mass long-distance commerce, the U.S. and other populous nations have produced cities of a size rarely seen before in human history. Megacities are a living environment that we have not evolved to tolerate, which inflicts numerous and increasing health risks, social pathologies, and psychological burdens, and which will be very hard to support economically after the fossil fuels dry up. China is by one measure much farther along in this process than the U.S., having hundreds of cities with millions, or tens of millions, of people each; I have heard an urban Chinese person refer to a sprawling city of well over a million people as "a small town." I don't know what will happen in China as the fossil fuel era winds down, but it isn't likely to be easy for them. So I wouldn't insist that people who are now happily living in Chicago ought to move away, but if you're a young person looking for a future home, pick a more modest-sized metro with less concrete and crowding and you'll be doing yourself a serious favor.

Chapter 5: Getting Out of Dodge

If you're living in a place that's seriously unsustainable, where should you move for a less grim future? As we will see, this will depend upon your personal preferences and circumstances. These should primarily include your political, religious, and cultural affiliations, your social ties, and your potential for employment. More fortunate Americans, driven by the false promise of a stable consumer lifestyle and political regime that will always be pretty much the same across the country, have often chosen their homes based on such secondary criteria as pleasant weather, ultra-low state taxes, or the proximity of beaches or ski slopes. These amenities are nice, if that's what you value, but far less important than a relatively secure living situation within a supportive community.

Some people will be happy in their larger geographic region and only want to get out of a coastal city with too high a population and too low an elevation to be well situated to face America's coming decline. What about someone who lives in Los Angeles, Phoenix, or Las Vegas and wants to get out of not just that city, but the broader region it's in? When the entire region is facing serious long-term problems, just moving out of Phoenix to Humboldt, Arizona, say, will not avoid the problem. Your life might be a little cheaper there, and a small community with less wealth might suffer less from decline, but droughts, suffocating heat waves, and fires will affect you too. In fact, in case of crises the authorities will consider it a much higher priority to keep power, water, and fuel flowing to Phoenix, because seven thousand angry citizens are easier to deal with (or evacuate, in the worst case) than a million angry citizens. The *entire* Southwest is going to be in trouble, and each person who can remove themselves from it in advance reduces the problem by that much. So: people who don't already live in the most threatened

regions *should not* move there, and current residents who are willing and able to leave them should strongly consider doing so, and soon.

Let me emphasize that there are two distinct reasons to consider leaving as soon as you can manage it. One is that, especially if you live in the Southwest, you might not have much longer before the consequences of climate change start seriously hammering your hometown. The other is that, especially if you live in the Southwest, less discreet members of the Red superfaction are beginning to talk about wanting to make sure you can't escape. *Salon* recently reported (Derysh 2021) that sitting congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene (Q-Ga.) agreed that relocators from California might be barred from voting in their new homes, this in response to a right-wing pundit who suggested that former blue-state residents should be "actively discriminat[ed] against ... through legislation," including not only exclusion from the franchise but "hav[ing] to pay a tax for their sins [sic]." To these representatives of their superfaction, people from California or other diverse areas are not Real Americans and, therefore, effectively, *non*-Americans who shouldn't have the right to go to other states and be treated as American citizens. If the Union were to fully break up, or states became free to ignore the rights of citizens, there is a high risk that refugees from Southwestern disasters would not be permitted to leave, or would be allowed into or through Red states only if they possessed significant portable wealth to hand over ("a tax for their sins"). Again, if you personally would prefer to leave for a Red state because you are a religious conservative, that might not matter. Could you prove it during a crisis—assuming you were given the chance?

"Doesn't the ability to move away from a future disaster zone reflect privilege?"

Yes, it does. That doesn't mean that it's wrong for you to do it. If moving out of a danger zone made matters worse for those who were left behind, being the first rat off the sinking ship might be immoral. However, the contrary is true in most cases. Of course, if bourgeois outmigration meant, e.g., that all the doctors and nurses left the state, that would be harmful; but this seems unlikely to happen. It's more

likely that if some ordinary workers move out, a tighter labor market would force employers to offer the remaining workers higher pay, or benefits or fairer scheduling or paid job training, to recruit the labor they want.

Underprivileged groups suffer the most from both overpopulation and overly greedy resource use. Between 2010 and 2019, Latino populations in the West increased by over 200% in the highest-risk areas for fire compared to zero-risk areas, even as white populations in the highest-risk areas fell 32% (Coleman 2021). The explanation is that many working-class Latinos have been priced out of housing in the core urbanized areas, and can only afford housing in more remote, higher-risk rural areas. Every middle-class resident who moves out of an urbanized area without being replaced by one from another state (or country) thereby reduces overall housing demand, and makes housing in the lower-risk area a tiny bit cheaper. The wealthier use more water than average, too, so the loss of their consumption makes a little more water available for others.

If you believe disaster—at least serious economic decline, if not something more spectacular—is probably coming sooner or later for your current hometown, removing yourself from its path in advance will reduce the future burden on others, as well as yourself. You and your family won't be adding to the number of needy people standing in line at a food bank, or sleeping on gym floors after an evacuation. If friends and family who remain behind in that area someday ended up as refugees due to climate catastrophe or homeless due to job loss, you'd be able to invite them to come and stay with you, helping them to get established in a more sustainable area.

Where should you go, then? There are several criteria to consider at the regional level.

- Future climate and economic circumstances
- Present employment opportunities
- Family or community ties
- Possible political future

By and large, the northwestern United States east to the northern Great Plains should be avoided by most people. Day and Hall (2016) evaluate most of that region as being among the more sustainable parts of the country, except for the densely populated western part of Oregon and Washington, but ecosystem services in most of the area, such as water supply, are quite low. A major reason for that "sustainability" is therefore that population density is low, and most of the area has few towns of sufficient size to offer many employment opportunities. The wet coastal portions of Oregon and Washington have (or have had) a climate suitable to sustain large populations, but the physical and political climate has appealed to enough people that cost of living in the bigger cities is getting very high. The region is also seeing significant climate and infrastructure problems, such as bizarre heat waves. Summer droughts and fire risks will probably also increase in the Northwest (e.g., U.S. Global Change Research Program 2016, National Drought Mitigation Center 2021).

The dry parts of the continental Northwest have some things in common economically and culturally with parts of the dry Southwest. If your marketable skills are in a field that is by its nature predominantly Western—ranching, for example—or if you are deeply emotionally attached to the Western way of life (Woodard's [2012] "Far West" culture), then you may be one of the few people who would be best off moving from the Southwest to the Northwest. Beware of areas of highest fire risk, though.

Most of the Great Plains, including the wetter eastern parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska and the Dakotas, are considered by Day and Hall (2016) to be in good position for the future. However, as for the Northwest, much of that sustainability comes from their low populations. The Dakotas, in particular, are too dry for non-irrigated agriculture. Precipitation may sometimes increase, but become more variable, with less snow and hotter summer temperatures (U.S. Global Change Research Program 2018), while in the southern Great Plains, life-threatening heat may become the summer norm. Probably the only people who should move to the Great Plains are people who have local ties and/or specialized skills in local demand.

"What about Alaska and Hawai'i?"

Don't even think about Hawai'i. Hawai'i already has super-expensive housing, is remotely located in the middle of the ocean, and most of its food and consumer goods are supplied from outside. It was brought into the Union relatively recently, at gunpoint, so that it could serve as a naval base for the American empire. If the federal government lost the ability to exert constant power over Hawai'i, the state might well reclaim effective, if not overt, independence, and recently arrived "haoles" with few locally useful skills would not be popular people.

Alaska may be slightly less remote and expensive, but still gets a lot of food and other goods shipped in from distant places at high cost. Climate change will be conspicuous in this area, including melting of the permafrost that underlies many communities. As we have seen, some Russian thinkers like the idea of taking back Alaska, and its fossil fuels, once the U.S. falls apart. It's not impossible that parts of the state would end up under Russian occupation. Rural Alaskans are mostly First Nations people and many have not yet been bludgeoned into forgetting all their traditional knowledge, so might be able to go back to fending for themselves if left alone to do so. Unless you are equally well equipped or have real ties to Alaska, there's no reason you should prefer town living in Alaska to town living in the Lower 48, and plenty of reason why you shouldn't.

For everyone else, the eastern half of the country, though more densely populated, should still be preferred for its greater capacity to absorb a large number of migrants. The primary reason for this is its far greater freshwater supplies, both now and in the predicted future. Water is life: both agriculture and industry, to say nothing of daily life, require water. People with very specialized skills, who can only work or be employed in a few places, are likely to weigh employment heavily in selecting a new home. However, most people could equally well be employed in any region, though not in every town in any region. In some places, the same skills might get you a different

job title and a lower salary. Perhaps that is not as unthinkable as we have been taught to believe.

As will be discussed later in stronger terms, for those who do not have substantial savings or in-demand skills, a long-distance move is far more feasible if you have someone on the far end who can help you until you settle in. Likewise, for most older people, being near (even if sometimes not *too* near) younger relatives is a major benefit. If moving to a specific community where you have trustworthy family or friends is your best or only means of getting out of a dangerous spot, then you may have to settle for whatever political circumstances come with that.

If these are not considerations, I consider it rational to place very heavy weight on future political circumstances. As I argued above, with the country facing an escalating risk of civil war, it seems entirely possible that the eastern United States will someday be divided into multiple nations—hopefully only two and both good-sized, as anything else could well precipitate an immediate war and/or humanitarian catastrophe. At present, it seems fairly likely that much of the Northeastern quarter of the country, west to Minnesota (and, I prefer to believe, Iowa), would form a more-or-less democratic nation, at least if the citizenry of each state has an effective voice, while a larger Southeastern region, minimally from Missouri to South Carolina, Texas, and Florida, would prefer to form an illiberal, theocratic semi-democracy or Herrenvolk democracy. The future affiliations of a few border states, as noted, are hard to predict.

I strongly favor secular democracy. I think it is worth making a priority of striving to ensure that some portion of the current Union preserves that form of government as we decline, and would strongly prefer to live in that portion. If you feel the same, in looking for a new home you should focus on the northeastern quarter of the continental U.S.—but *not* the already overpopulated areas of the extreme Northeast. Readers who would prefer to live under overtly religious government or Herrenvolk democracy should look to the Southeast as the place most congenial to their beliefs. For reasons noted above I am unwilling to predict the fates of Ohio, Georgia,

North Carolina, Virginia, and possibly Indiana, but some of them could be worth gambling on. (Any of them would be if they're the only option available to you. Most people—though not all—could at least physically survive in any of those states, no matter how odious they might find its future government. If everyone stays parked in the Southwest, many *won't* survive.)

Secular democrats, especially ones who consider themselves liberal or who emphasize their identity as members of targeted subgroups, may be inclined to move to the bluest states they can find, avoiding the risks and short-term downsides of moving to a red-ruled bluish state such as Wisconsin. This "Big Sort," already progressed alarmingly far, could become a *catastrophic* mistake. Insurrectionist theocrat Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri was reported by the *Kansas City Star* (Desrochers 2022) to celebrate on the day *Roe v. Wade* was overturned by claiming that this would cement Republican national rule via the electoral college—minority rule, though he failed to acknowledge it. Here's his gloating prediction:

> [T]he effect is going to be that more and more red states are going to become more red, purple states are going to become red and the blue states are going to get a lot bluer. And I would look for Republicans as a result of this to extend their strength in the Electoral College. And that's very good news.

Well, good for conservative Christian men anyway (he also envisions that, as the reporter phrased it, "social conservatives would no longer have to work with fiscal conservatives in politics," the implications being fairly clear). Since purple states mostly have GOP-dominated legislatures, as do some bluish states thanks to Project Redmap and the extreme gerrymandering that followed, Hawley's assumption and hope is that women who fear they might someday need an abortion, or people who need to use contraception or to exist as LGBTQ (or, perhaps, non-Christian), will flee those states, tipping their factional balance into the genuinely red zone. The solidly blue states, though, are *not* safe or able to house all those fleeing heretics and infidels. Since they are small and/or urban-

dominated, most are already densely populated, as their housing costs may hint. California is spacious, but running out of water in many places. New England has water, but cannot begin to cultivate its own food.

Under South Africa's apartheid regime, Africans were confined to "bantustans," small reservations on poor land that were barely survivable—very much like Native American reservations in the first wave of American imperialism. Remember that word and keep it handy in formulating your plans for the future; consider its application to the urban vs. rural distribution of factions in the Yugoslavian civil war and genocide. At all costs, the Blue faction should not be collaborating in allowing themselves to be packed into bantustans in hard times.

Facing a permanent superminority in the Senate despite holding a majority of the population, those bantustans would face any kind of oppression and exploitation the supermajority desired. For example, the Border Patrol—a militarized agency employing many right-wingers—now has the power to essentially run amuck, freely stopping, harassing or assaulting anyone they like, within 100 miles of any border. That area includes almost two-thirds of the U.S. population (Jones 2022), who are disproportionately blue because the target zone encompasses most of our largest cities, which are coastal, and some entire small states in the blue Northeast. Even if it remained possible for a liberal President to be elected and take office, the recent trend for single lower-court Trump judges to seize control of national executive policy could mean that a permanently red Senate and federal court system could direct the agency into a permanent role of terrorizing the Blue faction.

Trump also has now explicitly stated that if re-elected or re-installed by coup in 2024, he would illegally seize control of the National Guard in blue states and send them into blue cities (Chicago being named) to be used against criminals, drug users, the mentally ill, and the homeless; on the excuse of controlling crime he would build concentration camps for "maybe . . . millions," putatively all homeless people, from blue cities (Baron 2022). If blue states or regions attempted to secede in response to such tyrannical abuses,

they could be met with even greater military violence, which, as in Yugoslavia, would be easier because of the small geographic areas to target. Or they might just be blockaded, at which point they would find that generating most of the nation's economic activity doesn't fully compensate for generating very little of its food. (Go to DuckDuckGo—not Google—and look up Qalqilya if you want to know what it's like to live in an urban bantustan when the farmland is held by a faction that hates you.)

Guaranteed abortion access shouldn't be the deciding factor for most people in choosing where to move. How many of the people who have the luxury of choosing where to move, which implies that they do have some savings, will really need an abortion in the next few years and not be able to afford travel to another state or smuggled medication? It's horrible to think that if your daughter were raped your state government would try to turn her into an incubator, but is it *likely*? And if it did happen, would you have resources to help? There will be more and more informal underground railroads to help women facing health catastrophes and the like, I would hope. But safe abortion may become less available anyway as the industrial age declines. Meanwhile, blue bantustans where abortion is now protected, stripped of effective voices in the national political process, could soon face federal abortion bans and federal violence. Your children's liberties and lives, as well as your own, could depend upon your not gerrymandering yourself into political oblivion.

Therefore, if Josh Hawley—the Senator who pumped his fist at an insurrectionist rally—says that he hopes people like *you* will pick up and move from Arizona or North Carolina to San Francisco and Boston, *don't do it*! You know very well that he doesn't have *your* best interests in mind. To him, you're an enemy to be crushed. Don't climb into the winepress. Instead, move out of a ruby-red theocratic state where you have no voice, or a sapphire-blue state that's not sustainable, to a purple state or red-ruled blue state where you might, with luck, have a voice in shaping your own future.

"Are you saying we should just throw all the minorities and liberals in the "theocratic" states—most of the land area—under the bus? They're American citizens!"

No, I don't *want* to see the Union break up, nor to see any of its parts become authoritarian. But when a large imperial state breaks up, successor nations go their own way. There's no stopping it. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia could no longer dictate Poland's laws. After the Roman empire collapsed into chaos, every barbarian warlord did exactly what he wanted for a while. At all costs, we must avoid that outcome with the addition of nuclear weapons.

Once the regions of the U.S. have become separate countries, if those in other successor nations see one nation's laws becoming retrogressive and cruel, that's no more their problem or their responsibility than it is ours today if Mexico's laws are retrogressive and cruel. Hopefully, they would set up an underground railroad to help members of scapegoat groups escape. If the breakup is slow and/or peaceful enough, some people could vote with their feet in advance—as, indeed, a few are already doing. Southerners who see the future becoming too dangerous for them might move north. Northern conservatives might move south on the promise of living in a state where their beliefs are dominant.

Is any of this desirable? Certainly not. But it would be better than a massive, all-out civil war with no clear front lines. Or, if the consequences of schism seem totally intolerable, we might try tolerating each other instead.

Let me answer a provocative question that might be occurring to people from each extreme of the political spectrum. Lefty first:

"Fifteen states with less total population than California get thirty senators. Why don't 50,000 or 150,000 of us each move to Alaska, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Wyoming and just take 'em over*?"*

Aside from the fact that there wouldn't be jobs or housing for so many people? It's a bad idea to try to hijack a state—to move in, hoping not to join and add your diversity to the local culture but to impose your own culture on an existing population who over-

whelmingly don't share it. Such a campaign can influence a small state's politics. New Hampshire has been for decades the target of a Free State project that encourages "libertarians" (many actually rather theocratic, with weaponry as their primary liberty issue) to move to the state, and they now have the numbers or money to exert considerable political influence. Christian libertarian Kenneth Royce, under the pen name of Boston T. Party, wrote a novel proposing a Free State takeover and secession of Wyoming, planned out in competent detail, as an alternative (Party 2004), but the super-rich funders and many thousands of committed people that the plan would have required did not appear.

When carpetbaggers like the Free Staters change laws affecting public safety, longtime residents reasonably resent it. At that, the "libertarians" target states whose populations are not only small, but mostly rural, white, conservative in the traditional sense of that word, and generally pro-gun, therefore not all that dissimilar from them. They haven't tried to take over Rhode Island or Hawai'i. A swarm of Californians moving to Wyoming to take over their politics would inspire anger, if not violent backlash, from locals who would say, reasonably enough, "You're trying to get away from the problems in California by bringing them here to dump on us." Indeed, as noted, there is already sometimes violent backlash against Californians for moving in at all, regardless of how they vote.

When you move to a state where many people share your most essential beliefs about politics, whether the legislature does or not, or when you move to a place for personal or economic reasons, you can vote your conscience with pride. Moving to a state with the intention of depriving the people at your destination of the ability to live as the large majority would prefer to live is a different matter. If (when) the campaign fails, how do you think you'll enjoy living there, among people who hate you and whom you hold in contempt?

However, there is a difference between trying to overwhelm a state with a diametrically opposing culture and hoping to help to tip the balance in a state with a more evenly balanced culture. Conservatives, it should be noted, are doing this now, even though they already hold most of the country's landmass. A recent NPR

report (Burnett 2022) discussed a trend of blue-state, especially Californian, conservatives moving to Texas. It is entirely sensible for conservatives to leave a state that is firmly liberal, secular, and overregulated for a state that eschews regulations other than the religiously inspired, where they will be happier with the government. It's called voting with your feet. However, Texas is, under the surface, an increasingly purple state as its population becomes majority-minority, and its government has responded with increasingly extreme gerrymanders and voter-suppression laws. Some Californian conservatives explicitly identify their inmigration as contributing to the goal of maintaining GOP dominance of the state. One migrating activist, the reporter says, "maintains that Republicans migrating from blue states are the most militant about stopping creeping liberalism." She's quoted as saying:

> People used to come up to me and say "Don't California my Texas." But we're the damn cavalry! We're here to save you. Because we know what's going to happen. And if we don't run for office, get involved in school boards, and pay attention and get out and vote, then you're gonna California Texas.

Implicitly, the intention of this conservative interstate migrant is to contribute to suppressing the preferences of what she believes would soon be a majority of the Texans who are able to access voting. If she believed that most Texans, and their children who in the coming decades will grow up and seek to vote, really were and would remain firmly conservative, Texan conservatives would not need to be "saved" from creeping liberalism by an influx of migrants. As one of the biggest states, Texas has an awful lot of electoral votes and gerrymandered Congressional districts to deliver, and she views her move as contributing to the long-term goal of keeping those, as well as the state leadership, in GOP hands. Should the Union start to come apart, her inmigration would likewise increase the likelihood that Texas became an independent Christian-nationalist republic.

In the map Stephen Marche envisioned for a breakup of the Union, the "Red" republic would get a huge majority of the land, including a

large majority of the land whose climate is suitable for agriculture. And that is assuming that a few large, minority-ruled northern states do not end up like Kashmir, with their rulers managing to force their citizens into a country they don't want to be part of. However, a solid majority of the current population of the eastern U.S., and of the likely first waves of climate refugees, would prefer to be in the "Blue" democracy. More states choosing democracy means more room where those people can live. It is entirely reasonable for Blue climate refugees to choose borderline states with populations that might plausibly go either way, hoping to tip the balance. I hope to retire to Iowa, where I have family, in the hope that that state would choose democracy over theocracy when the time came, and the sincere belief that it could do so. My moving and voting there, though, would also inherently increase by 0.0001% the chance that it actually would; and there's nothing wrong with that. If Blues were to refuse to move strategically with their children's future in mind, while Reds do it in large numbers, the former faction would be catastrophically disadvantaged; but the stakes could be far higher than control of Congress. And you may soon have few good alternatives anyway.

"Why should we let minorities and city folks have a say in where Midwestern states wind up? Let's do whatever it takes to maintain GOP minority rule until the Union breaks up, and shove all the liberals into New England and Southern California. Then we can just build walls around those spots and leave them to starve to death and eat each other!"

Polarization means that increasing numbers of people in each superfaction actively hate the other, and wish for its members to suffer and be impoverished or perhaps best, die. They might like the idea of forcing many millions of their "enemies" into bantustans that were small enough that they couldn't survive there, then cutting them off. Because of the distribution of mostly-rural vs. mostly-urban states, only those in the Red superfaction could rationally envision any possibility of doing this.

If they managed it, though, the Blue superfaction would then likely have no choice but to pick up guns and invade the neighboring

nation to seize some of the farmland on their borders. The Right likes to call it Lebensraum; you may have heard that term? Don't think that there are no guns in urbanized "liberal" states, or that nobody there knows how to use them. A war in which you are on the less numerous side, even if you have by far the more territory, is not an enjoyable experience. The population imbalance might not be huge at the national level, but every little slice of farmland on the border is sparsely populated (that's why it's farmland) and could be hard to defend. Furthermore, tens of millions of people who had found themselves unwillingly trapped in Redland by the choices of minority-ruled state governments would serve as a fifth column. (Do you envision rounding up or ethnically cleansing all those folks? That would amount to a two-front war—and increase the chance that other large nations would start pouring large amounts of military aid into the Blue nationlets.)

For the same reason, it would be equally important that if large numbers of Americans want to live in a theocracy after the Union breaks up, the ensuing Christian nationalist state should end up with a territory big enough, with enough water and crop or pasture land, to support all those people. Given America's current demographics and politics, this isn't going to be a problem at all: Red states have far more land per capita and include a large, geographically cohesive bloc of states whose appetite for evangelical government seems to be limited, to the extent that it still is, only by the Supreme Court. But if it *were* a problem, steps would have to be taken to make sure that that nation had enough land. No rational liberal would want eighty or a hundred million people all to be shoved into Alabama and northern Idaho. That would guarantee instant warfare.

If the United States breaks apart, no matter how much we may all hate, fear, and despise one another, we'd better not try to make it impossible for the other half to survive. On the contrary, we'd better try to make sure that each half (or every major fraction) of the population has what they need to survive. Otherwise, a catastrophic war could not possibly be avoided.

The next chapter will discuss criteria for selection of a destination community and resources to help you identify possible future homes, and the following three chapters will identify some specific regions and towns that might be promising in the groups of eastern states that we have broken down according to their political and cultural inclinations.

Chapter 6: Is Green Acres the Place to Be?

For most people, let's acknowledge upfront, the right place to live is *where I can get a job*, for whatever type of work you are qualified to do. If you are a professional or skilled worker for whom few potential jobs exist, you'll likely prefer to apply for jobs in places of interest, get hired, then move to whatever community the employer is in. If you're a logger, you'd better move someplace with a lot of trees. People who do jobs that are commonplace or in demand almost everywhere (e.g., road construction, auto mechanics, teaching, nursing) might feel more able to move to the perfect community and then look for work. Of course, these days some people are able to work remotely; just check the internet service before you move.

It would be much better not to move to a huge city that already has too many people. We discussed their environmental and logistical problems before, and we will see repeatedly that they have special political problems in GOP-dominated states. Many white-collar professional or cultural workers may think that they have to live in big cities to advance their careers, e.g., as medical specialists, scientists, artists, or musicians. This is usually not true, though. You probably could get a job, or even start a business, that uses your skills in a moderate-sized city. It would probably pay less (but your cost of living will be lower) and it would probably convey less status in your field. But how heavily do you prioritize status, vs. comfort and security?

You also don't want to move to a very small town unless you have local ties. In little towns where everyone knows everyone, unless you are part of the gene pool, you will be an outsider for the rest of your life. There are few jobs in small towns, and a stranger from another state will not be hired over a local who has been known for decades. If you really insist on moving to a small town where you lack family,

it would be wise to select one where many influential residents belong to a church you already belong to or would be happy to join. In some places, 10,000 people is too small—and where you come from also makes a difference.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, many well-to-do city folks fleeing to their second homes in rural areas were shocked to find that they were barred from reaching them, barricaded into them by armed locals, or expelled from them en masse by a county order (e.g., Bowlin 2021, Petersen 2020). The locals had very legitimate fears about large numbers of outsiders with money who bought up limited grocery supplies and might have imported more cases of illness than small local hospitals could handle. Still, urbanites are used to a world run by written laws, in which a person who pays the mortgage and property taxes on a house has the right to live in it. In an isolated town where genetic ties determine who is part of the community, such official paperwork might be necessary but it isn't sufficient. If you live in such a town *full time* for a few years and get along well with the residents, they might let you go on living there if the rule of law declines, on sufferance.

Or they might not. Here's an anonymous comment made on a conservative blog regarding possible breakup of the Union:

> I could see a wild dash towards the coasts if a breakup happens, as I'm betting that the West Coast expats/migrants are being tolerated elsewhere solely because they have money to enrich the local landowners and business owners. Should the Dollar take on the ultimate value of all currencies (nothing), the people from the west coast will experience a radical collapse in various forms of status and, if not directly told to get out, would find themselves pushed away from their new 'homes.'

If you were less than firmly embedded in a parochial community when the protection of U.S. law went away, whether you were allowed to go on living there—or at all—might depend upon whether your neighbors considered you to be more valuable to them than the

stuff they thought you might have stored in your house. So be careful.

There are literally thousands of suitable eastern communities within the range of, say, 5000 to 200,000 people. Medium-sized cities may be questionably sustainable in the long term. (Day and Hall [2016] evaluate pretty much every metro area worthy of the name as medium-risk at best.) However, we have to remember that migration now needs to consider present circumstances, not those of the far, post-fossil-fuel future. To significantly slow and reduce the human suffering of the coming collapse of the Southwest, at least several million people should emigrate from that region in the coming decade. Where could so many people go?

Many communities have been growing by far more than 10% per decade, as are some states (unfortunately, including a couple of the most imperiled Southwestern states—some people haven't gotten the memo). Let's assume, to be conservative and use easy round numbers, that any town can accept an extra 10% of climate-motivated migration over 10 years, or about 1% per year, while giving its housing market and available employment and schools time to adjust without disruption. If you wanted to find new homes for a million people, hypothetically you could direct 100,000 people to each of 10 places, or 100 people each to 10,000 places. But there are not 10,000 communities that are big enough for migrants to consider. There are more than ten big cities that could take 100,000 each, but those cities are really too big already and, as I will remind you more than once, increasingly deprived of political rights.

There *are* just about 1000 communities in the Northeastern region that have 10,000 people or more, and you could envision each of them receiving 1000 people; however, some of those are suburbs of big metropolitan areas and/or intolerably expensive, or conversely too impoverished to supply jobs. And in fact, we would really be looking for homes in that region for several million people. Therefore, the little towns of several thousand that we might believe will be the most sustainable in the distant future will not be able to absorb all the people who should move in the near future.

Some people will need to move to regional cities of 100,000 or 200,000 people or more, which can usually absorb an extra 10,000 or 20,000 people apiece. Later, some of those people, having established regional ties and picked up regional culture, might move to nearby small towns and be more easily welcomed. Rather than trying to move from, say, Los Angeles to Rhinelander, WI, you'd be wiser to move to Green Bay or Lansing and spend several years becoming a Wisconsinite (and learning to cope with that city's relatively bearable winter) before moving to a small, remote town. You would then not have to describe yourself as newly arrived from L.A., and would probably be both more welcome and more competent to fit in.

Alternatively, you might spend the rest of your life in Green Bay or Lansing, and your child might marry someone from a smaller town and make a smart choice to move there. The rearrangement of North American populations that climate change and American collapse will cause will take several generations to complete. Your immediate goal should be to move not to a place where you think your great-grandchildren will be best placed to make a living, but to a place where you think *you* will.

But it also isn't feasible for everyone to move to those medium-sized cities. There are only about 40 cities roughly in the 100,000 to 300,000 population range in the northeastern region, where I would expect most of my readers to prefer to go. Some of those are part of much larger metropolitan areas that I strongly recommend avoiding. So directing 20,000 people to each of 50 medium-big cities wouldn't work either.

There can in fact be room for millions of migrants to find housing and an income, but they can't all head for the same places, nor the same *types* of place. Looking only at the Northeast again, several hundred thousand people can certainly find space in the medium-sized cities. There are around 150 cities with populations of 50,000 to 100,000; though some will be intolerably located, several hundred thousand people might be absorbed there, and several hundred thousand more by the similar number of small cities in the 30,000 to 50,000 range. Several hundred thousand more people could move to the several hundred towns having 10,000 to 30,000 residents. The

similarly numerous towns having 5000 to 10,000 residents have limited job opportunities and many would be unwelcoming to migrants from the coast, but over time many of them could accept several hundred more people apiece; in fact, a few dozen extra residents per year might provide a valuable boost to local economies. Though larger cities are far less numerous, each one can take far more newcomers, resulting in relatively even potential distributions across size categories.

If migrants are not to find a situation where they face tight job markets and unaffordable housing, while nearby towns languish as their populations decline, everyone can't move to the same state, nor to the same kind of community. Most readers who might consider moving soon would be moving from large urban areas, so many, if not most, of you should try to move to smaller communities than you now live in. You might have stereotypes about small towns in "flyover" states, but the worst negatives are hardly universally true. Smaller towns do have limited jobs and few urban luxuries. However, in view of the anticipated future of decline, learning to live contentedly without such luxuries might be wiser than striving to hold onto them, especially if you have or want kids.

It is easier, though, for most people to move to a city, where nobody will notice another stranger or care where you came from. Lifelong urbanites often don't transition well to very small towns, if they don't have a background that helps them to adapt to the local culture, and can become an object of suspicion. Housing is on average more expensive in cities, but some small towns have almost no rental housing, making them out of reach for newcomers who can't afford to buy a house. Many (though by no means all) are almost all-white, and even when residents are generally tolerant, visible minorities can feel that they stick out like a sore thumb. These days, with the country approaching that dangerous polarization stage, anyone who appears too obviously liberal might be unwelcome or unsafe in many small towns. The more your family's demographics, job skills, and cultural tastes resemble those of typical small-town residents, the more strongly you should consider moving to a small town. That both puts you in a maximally sustainable place, and

leaves more space in larger towns for your compatriots who really wouldn't be welcomed in most small towns.

Californians should consider themselves extra likely to fall into the latter group. California is despised by right-wingers for various reasons, including its high racial diversity, social tolerance, and suffocating regulations. In addition, there is a noted trend of richer Californians moving out of the state and settling in numbers in a few particularly attractive small towns, where their wealth allows them to bid up the price of the limited available housing. Locals resent them not only out of prejudice, but because their arrival increases lifelong residents' cost of living. Residents of small towns (like the fellow whose thinly veiled violent fantasies I quoted earlier) may groan when they hear about *Californians* moving in next door in a way that they wouldn't if it were an Arizonan family, even if the family has the same income and pays the same price for the house. Being able to avoid this hostility by a staged move or a strategic choice about how you describe your origins could be beneficial.

It is also important, to limit this hostility and to avoid economic difficulties, that not too many people move to the same places in a short period of time. This is a point I emphasize repeatedly for good reason. Nice towns can be spoiled by too much population increase happening too fast. While I mention in later chapters some examples of small towns that appear promising, they are far from being the only small towns in those states where one might be able to make a living or find trustworthy neighbors. If you want to live in a small town, the best choice would be to go someplace where you can claim personal or family ties, or else do some investigation and pick a place that not too many other people are likely to pick. You do not want to be seen as part of an invading wave, but as one person or family who just happens to have moved in.

In this internet era, there are excellent free tools that everyone thinking of leaving a high-risk zone can use to help them identify more promising destinations. City-Data (www.city-data.com) is a free website that amasses huge amounts of data on America's cities, towns, and villages, from population and demographic figures to

average house costs, income, commuting time, local natural disasters, water system violations, nearby schools and colleges, local businesses, radio and TV stations, and so on. It is invaluable for anyone searching for a new place to live who doesn't already have an obvious destination, though it contains enough errors and omissions that critical information should be verified elsewhere. The Advanced City Search tool, though often several years out of date, allows you to filter using huge numbers of criteria to see what places fit your desires.

Niche (www.niche.com) provides less detailed data, but has the useful feature of hosting anonymous reviews of tens of thousands of communities. No individual reviews can give you a better idea of a big city's economy, government or culture than hard data or news stories, since any one person's experience of a city is so limited. Such reviews are most useful for small towns, and even there should be taken with a grain of salt. There will always be residents or ex-residents with an axe to grind, so look at the overall number of good vs. bad reviews before taking criticisms too seriously, except for criticisms that could only be made by members of minority groups. If there are 10 reviews claiming that a small town is fantastic and one claiming that it's a crime-ridden drug den, that one person is probably a bit paranoid; if the numbers are evenly balanced, that's a red flag. Further, if your dream is to live in a place where you can walk in the woods by day and see the stars by night, bad reviews that amount to "the bars don't stay open late enough" might read as positive to you.

Let's go through an example. I mentioned the appalling housing costs in New York City, which are likely to persist until local conditions deteriorate far enough that the wealthy people who run up those costs can't insulate themselves from the problems anymore and lots of people start moving out. But America's market failures, like its climate risks, are not at all evenly distributed, and there's plenty of land in the states of the eastern seaboard that isn't part of the megalopolis. Let's suppose that you're an NYC resident who wants to stay in the state to be near family; you insist on living in a city big

enough to have cultural resources; and you don't want to have to work three jobs to pay the rent.

We consult City-Data.com's advanced city search tool with three criteria: cities in New York with populations over 50,000 and median gross rent under $900. We'll find eight cities, ranging from Utica to Albany. Those of largest size are Syracuse (according to the returned table, about 145,000 people), Buffalo (259,000), and Rochester (210,000). We can follow links to the City-Data pages to find out more, as well as consulting Google, Wikipedia, etc. Here we learn that City-Data's data for the search function is not kept up to date, so any criterion of great importance to you needs to be verified elsewhere. On the individual city pages, all three of these cities are reported to have median rent in 2019 that was about $100 higher (and of course, the populations have increased). Those figures are doubtless higher yet post-COVID, as recent skyrocketing rents in many cities have not yet been incorporated into major databases. Still, their *relative* affordability probably hasn't been changed much by the pandemic, and the overall cost of living index is reported as 101.4 to 102.3 for these cities, where 100 is the nationwide average, compared to 162.3 for New York, NY.

Each of these three cities has a large, diverse economy, over a hundred parks and natural or landscaped public areas, a public transit system, and numerous cultural resources (symphony orchestras, theaters and museums, public festivals, diverse ethnic restaurants). Buffalo also has major-league football and hockey teams. Schenectady and Albany are smaller and more costly, but a shorter Amtrak ride to get to NYC if you wanted to be able to do that regularly. Buffalo is more expensive, and Syracuse is home to an entire landscape made of industrial waste (Kimmerer 2013), so let's consider Rochester as our first choice.

Rochester is an ethnically diverse port city on the south shore of Lake Ontario. Its metropolitan area includes Irondequoit, a much smaller and less diverse municipality also on the list of eight hits, which has a harbor used for fishing. Both cities, however, are mostly located well above sea level. In a less globalized, resource-limited future, the economic advantages of this location are likely to be more

conspicuous. Unemployment in Rochester was above the state average in late 2020, probably worsened by the pandemic, but cultural and employment opportunities are usually numerous. There are several hospitals, several universities and colleges (which have many jobs for both academics and non-academics), and importantly, one of the largest surviving centers of manufacturing in the U.S., including some major corporate factories and hundreds of smaller employers, mostly in high-tech industries. Rochester also has an active music industry. The professions that could not be employed in this city would be few indeed. Public schools are well-rated; crime, like in most large cities, is above-average but has been declining; racial inequality is a noted problem but one that may be found, sadly, in most American cities.

You may think life in the Big Apple is better than in Rochester, or any of those other smaller cities. Maybe it is, but is it more than three times better (the ratio of pre-pandemic median rents)? Or even 60% better (the ratio of overall costs of living, ignoring the question of how much more of one's income must be spent on a smaller, less comfortable shelter)? If not, then unless you genuinely *must* live in NYC for career or family reasons, why should you pay so much more just for the privilege of living there? Maybe Rochester or Buffalo could offer 97% of the things you like about city living—and with their lower costs of living, even if your paycheck was smaller, you might be able to enjoy urban amenities like restaurant meals, concerts, or sporting events more often, and use some of the money you save to go to NYC on vacation once in a while.

As a bonus, you'd be less vulnerable to climate catastrophes and associated supply chain disruptions. A few thousand more Manhattanites moving to each of these smaller metros each year would hardly throw the local economy or housing market into chaos. It could make the future much brighter for those individuals—and just a little brighter, too, for those remaining in NYC who would face a bit less less crowding and competition for housing. Who wants to be an early adopter?

What features make a good home town?

Criteria that I consider to be significant for everyone searching for a new home include:

- Cost of living, or median cost of rent or housing. Searchable figures are not up to date, as noted, but at least give you an idea of relative costs. I usually exclude expensive towns from consideration or recommend them with caveats. Even if you can afford to live there now, will you be able to pay your mortgage after the next economic crunch? And rich neighbors, after spending years prohibiting you from hanging clotheslines and such, aren't likely to cope well with crises.
- Unemployment rate. It's risky to move to an extremely depressed area with few jobs—though the long-term post-pandemic situation is, at this time, very hard to predict. I tend to suspect that small towns with reported severe drug problems are not able to meet their current residents' economic needs, much less those of newcomers, whatever the official unemployment rate might say. Even if you managed to make a living in such a town, an outsider who was doing noticeably better than locals could be resented.
- For urban areas, farmland in the broader region sufficient to meet minimal needs for food. This doesn't seem to matter now, but it might someday. (Remember what Joseph Tainter had to say about the effects of collapsing complexity on people who can't produce their own food.)
- Reasonable distance from any badly overgrown metropolitan area.
- Connection to long-distance public transportation via a nearby Amtrak station or intercity bus service, and in large towns a local bus system, in states where those are common.

"Why are you so obsessed with buses anyway?"

Public transportation is a valuable service. Of course, you can't guarantee that a bus line that exists now will exist ten years from now. Still, if you choose to live in a smaller community without the full range of services (e.g., bookstore, department store, medical

specialists), it would be nice to be able to get to a bigger city without having to rely on a private car. Someday you may have trouble keeping and maintaining a car, or there may (very well) be a gas crisis or delays in getting parts needed to keep it running, or you could develop a health problem or have an injury that keeps you from driving. Today, connectivity says good things about a town. A place where everyone can afford an SUV and drives everywhere won't handle decline well, and a place where residents who can't drive have very little contact with the outside world might not be a great place for strangers. Therefore, I consider small towns with intercity transportation service to be more appealing than those without, although in some states it's not possible to be too picky about this without greatly limiting one's options.

A city where you would not be able to live within walking distance of every place you will regularly need to go should preferably have at least some local bus service. If not, you are shackled to maintaining a car, or to paying much more for exploitative ride services. In the Northeast, some kind of transit service in medium-sized or larger cities is almost ubiquitous; in the Southeast, it is not.

I also point out current Amtrak stations. More cities, even quite small ones, have airports of some kind than train service, and Americans traveling long distances usually fly if they don't drive, so you may not see a reason to value train stations. Flying is less efficient in terms of fuel and carbon per passenger-mile, so it is likely to become less available in future; it will certainly become more expensive, and indeed is already becoming both pricey and miserable. If you will need or want to travel cross-country, it would be nice if you could easily do that by train. One may hope that as decline progresses, Amtrak will add more passenger lines that can run on existing railroad tracks.

Additional criteria that some individuals should carefully investigate include:

- Race. You do not want to be the only non-white person in your new town, so in searching for possible homes you might

specify a minimum population of your ethnic group, or a maximum percent white. However, majority-minority communities are often neglected or outright targeted by rural-dominated state governments, and can be at risk of vote suppression.

- Religion. If you belong to a minority religion or unusual denomination, you may want to prioritize the presence of a temple, masjid, etc. If you are LGBTQ+, you may want to confirm that there isn't a very aggressive local fundamentalist movement, or that some other people in your demographic are known to exist in the area.
- Schools. If you want your children to get a specific religious education (e.g., Catholic school, or weekend religious training), restrict your searching to communities where it's available. If you want your children to get a good secular education, check that the public schools' biology and history curricula aren't dictated by fundamentalists, or be prepared to compensate at home.
- Crime. Some depressed small towns, especially but not exclusively in the South, have crime rates that would embarrass New York. If you're from a tough neighborhood, this may not bother you at all. If you have kids and are inclined to be highly anxious, it will. But there is crime everywhere, and drugs are a problem all over the Rust Belt and Appalachia, so don't demand Utopia. In some small towns, the majority of what I would call "crime" consists of the local police finding excuses to rob townsfolk or travelers; the number of fines and arrest warrants issued locally each year can exceed the number of citizens. This should be a huge red flag for potential migrants, especially non-white people who would likely be prime targets of such regimes.
- Presence of a community college. If you are young or have not had the opportunity yet to learn a marketable skill, so that your only employment options are likely to be low-wage jobs, place a *very* high priority on living in a town where you could conveniently pursue education or training for jobs that would

give you a more secure economic position later in life. Commuting long-distance by car to take classes after a work shift is both physically and financially difficult.

- Presence of a library. City-data doesn't have this information for many communities, so online web searching will be needed. Most small towns in America do have libraries or are part of a regional library system. Most can't afford much of a library, but if there isn't one at all, it implies that reading isn't popular in the community. That would be a red flag for me.
- Presence of specific desired or needed services (e.g., a natural food store or farmers' market if you are vegan, specialist doctors or a compounding pharmacy if you have health problems that require regular care or supplies, cultural institutions that you adore or want to work for). Don't move to a teeny town out of a misplaced sense of doomerism if you will then be very unhappy that it lacks specialty resources you need or are unwilling to do without.

You can also study a detailed highway map of a state that appeals to you, and combine that with information from Internet research. Would you prefer to live in a town located right on an interstate with a commercial airport, or a town that's more in the backwoods, with a national forest on your doorstep or lake fishing nearby? Investigate towns that seem to offer prime locations. Some of these places will be objectively unpleasant communities—those very much do exist—but many, many towns have great potential to offer you and your kids, if any, a happy home if you approach them with a positive attitude.

Finally, if you are able to work remotely so would not be competing for a local job, there are as of this writing several dozen less fashionable smaller towns and cities—not confined to any particular region, but scattered around the country—that might actually *pay* you to move there, with cash, free land to build a house, or other incentives. Check out www.makemymove.com. Don't let one of these offers lull you into moving into, or staying in, a profoundly unsustainable region, though.

The political situation within states

The following is addressed entirely to liberals/moderates. Because of the "Southernification" trend, conservatives moving even to more liberal states (which I don't recommend, unless local ties make it necessary) could locate almost anywhere outside of the "blue islands" (the ethnically diverse cities or college towns) and find themselves among political allies. Liberals or often-discriminated-against minorities may presume that they should move to one of those blue islands, which would place much tighter limitations on their potential choices.

In fact, I strongly discourage liberals, especially educated urban liberals, from thinking their goal should be to find a smaller-city neighborhood full of fellow educated liberals to live in. Such choices have put America in grave danger; research by Brown and Enos (2021) reports that "[a] large proportion of voters live with virtually no exposure to voters from the other party in their residential environment." That is even more true of Democrats, who tend to cluster themselves more tightly, though part of that is not voluntary but due to America's persistent racial segregation. Political segregation threatens your immediate interests, as I have explained. Remember Josh Hawley's gleeful hope that you'll pack together in smaller and smaller reservations that have less and less representation in Congress and the Electoral College?

In the long run, it threatens the stability of the country. You *should* live, work, and socialize with people who aren't exactly like you, because it makes it harder for those people to demonize you. Consider the corrosive historical effect of segregation on race relations: you can't relate to someone you never interact with on an equal footing. Increasingly, we're applying the same practice to factional affiliation, and also to social class. Misunderstanding and hostility go in both directions: educated people who don't socialize with anyone who *doesn't* have a college degree easily fall into condescending, provocative stereotyping of the working classes, and in turn they are easily scapegoated by right-wing media, whose viewers often do not

recognize propaganda against educated people to be false because they don't know any.

Moreover, keep thinking that word "bantustan" to yourself and remember how Sarajevo and other cities were besieged and shelled in the Yugoslavian civil war. If worse comes to worst, it's a lot harder to target people who spread themselves out than people who have crowded themselves voluntarily into a tiny target. I recognize that some will have good reasons to feel that the immediate risk of such spreading out outweighs the long-term risk of being ghettoized (in the World War II, Polish Jewry sense of the term). For the rest, if half your new town is conservative, or most of the people on your block are conservative, that's not the end of the world. Get to know them without criticizing or condescending to them or pointing out (at least initially) that you think or believe differently, and you can usually get along fine. (For practice: Don't have a tantrum next time you meet someone who disagrees with you about COVID mandates.)

Obviously, there are limits. If you're a Democrat or just a democrat, you don't want to live in a town so universally and extremely right-wing that it's likely that more than one of your neighbors belongs to a white supremacist militia. You especially wouldn't want to be a visible minority or bicycle commuter in such a community. You can look up regional voting patterns online. Check out Niche reviews, especially of racially homogenous towns, and elected politicians from the area. Does the sheriff claim to be a "constitutional sheriff"—which means that he believes himself to be a kind of elected king of the county, with no state or federal laws capable of limiting his power over residents and visitors? You can guess how he will behave in time of crisis. If QAnon nuts or the equivalent are winning general elections, that is, at least for now, a community beyond hope. Move there, and you could someday get imprisoned or lynched for "molesting their children for adrenochrome on your secret Mars base." Google the town. Check out local news sources, which even in small towns will often be available online, though possibly paywalled. Are the big issues in city government and local media practical ones, like trash and potholes, or are howling mobs at school board meetings common?

If your new legislative district is conservative enough that the Republican primary is effectively the general election, by all means vote in that primary so that you can vote for sane conservatives and against Qrazies. Republicans in strongly Democratic cities, where the Democratic primary *is* the mayoral election, often do the same thing, quite properly. However, check your new state's laws to be sure you can't be thrown in prison for voting in one primary while belonging to the other party. In some states, you may need to join the party whose primaries you wish to vote in.

As previously noted, in GOP minority-ruled states, the legislative representation of existing urban residents is much smaller than their numbers would suggest. Many cities can be "cracked" into multiple mostly-rural districts so that residents' voices aren't represented in the legislature at all. Residents of these cities might regain some say in the political process by a simple, yet difficult means: *leave* the cities, and migrate to smaller communities in that state, enough different smaller communities and neighborhoods in those communities that they cannot be gerrymandered into a handful of districts, in numbers that could allow their votes to mean something at the state or federal district level.

The most extreme "pack and crack" GOP gerrymanders work in part because its victims cluster together and live in a limited number of places that are easily identified and targeted. Live in a big city in one of these states, and your vote won't count for much. Worse, you may become a target for a state legislature whose leaders actively wish and work to strip your community of political rights or undermine your economic well-being or even your health and safety. (And, ironically, that will be true even if you vote Republican.) Move to a small city in a reddish district, or a reddish town in a swing district, and even if you don't feel represented by your state legislator, at least the legislature won't actively work to harm you. It will provide your district with whatever services are consistent with its leaders' ideology, will not attempt to control your local police department or strip local politicians of power to do their jobs, and won't try to stop you from getting to the polls to vote for statewide offices.

It is not easy to do this. However, when people's economic or social conditions get bad enough or stressful enough, they will move when they see a chance at something better. That's what this book is all about, after all, and a move within a state is much easier than a move across the country. If populations of minority-ruled states spend the coming decade quietly rearranging themselves and the GOP continues to screw up everything it touches, someday the wind will change.

Chapter 7: Go Northeast, Young Man

To recap, climate migrants who prioritize future secular, democratic government over mild winter weather should focus on non-megalopolitan parts of the Northeastern U.S. I do not discuss or recommend the smaller coastal states with large urban populations, including New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Delaware, and Maryland. These states already represent by far the most densely populated region of the U.S., have little room to absorb newcomers and little farmland relative to their population, and are, therefore, often very expensive. New York is larger, and has plenty of counties outside the megalopolis that have been losing population. However, because of the state's high-to-excessive overall population, it might be best for most out-of-staters to leave those areas free for escaping NYC residents to move into.

New England states that remain mostly rural are sparsely populated because they have harsh environments and poor soil, and some are quite small. They cannot readily absorb hundreds of thousands more people apiece or feed them sustainably in future. I will admit that the state of Vermont is actively trying to encourage migration because its population has been declining, despite the fact that it is already overpopulated for long-term sustainability. New Hampshire is about as big as Vermont but has twice the population, and should certainly be avoided. Maine has low population density and is large enough to take a few migrants, but high costs of living indicate that there's not as much room for expansion as you would think from looking at a map. If New England is truly your dream home you can move there, but there isn't room for half a million others to do the same.

The states that will most likely be part of the future Northeast, should the Union break up, and that seem to have the most room for

new residents are Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, probably Pennsylvania, and possibly Iowa. Notwithstanding the current minority-rule situation in three of these, and the real possibility that their legislatures will facilitate a fascist coup in the near term (Gellman 2021), they have historically shared cultures that believed in democracy, and all have large amounts of farmland. They have a great deal to recommend them. They are all cold and dark in winter. However, as the residents of western towns now burning to the ground could tell you, there are worse things than heavy snowfall. Maybe you could just buy a warm coat and snowboots and take vitamin D.

Ohio, Virginia, and North Carolina could be questionable choices not because of their large populations, since Ohio is relatively sustainable, but because of their iffy political situations. If pre-Internet culture, economy, and geography were considered, Ohio and even Indiana ought to be part of the Northeastern bloc, and Virginia and North Carolina Southeastern, but in today's world, I wouldn't be too confident of any of those. I treat Ohio here with significant caveats, and the other three in Chapter 9.

I offer some suggestions below for some communities and regions of potential interest in each of the most suitable Northeastern destination states based on the assumption that you want to follow my advice to avoid the biggest cities and remote rural areas. These suggestions are subjective and individual. Some people have good reasons to feel safest in a big city. Contrarily, if much of your family lives in a rural region I've written off as having little potential, it would have much more potential for you, as long as your family doesn't *hate* you. I wish to make it clear that I'm *not* saying these are the only places in each state worth living in. There are some very nice-looking communities that I didn't list because they were so expensive, but if you happen to be a brain surgeon, that won't bother you. There are others, perhaps now economically stagnant and not very pleasant or friendly, that might be revitalized over time by the spread of climate migrants into a greater variety of smaller towns, bringing new blood and money. Diversity of choice is good. These are starting points that some people may find useful; after the first migrants learn about their new home town and the surrounding

region, they will be able to help their friends and relatives to make good choices within that region.

Almost all medium-sized cities (at least 40,000 to 50,000 people) in the Northeast have some public transit and a variety of cultural institutions, including performing arts (usually at least a theater and orchestra), small museums, parks, public festivals, and usually at least one or two minor league or semi-pro sports teams. Therefore, if you are a lifelong big-city resident you should know that you can move to a much smaller place with confidence that you can find many, many things to do with your spare time. To save space, I have not listed all of the available cultural amenities for every city; their absence would be more noteworthy.

On the other hand, small cities (or large towns) of 20,000 or so usually lack public transit and the sort of cultural institutions that require many participants and significant funding. When small towns have amenities in excess of what their size would lead one to expect, I remark upon the fact. If a town has a noted unusual feature, even if it's something that most people wouldn't care about (e.g., a stained glass industry, a drum and bugle corps), I mention that for the sake of the few people out there for whom that might be so interesting as to be a determining factor. I like to mention one or two prominent local events or popular activities for smaller towns, not because such things are important enough that they should cause migrants to prefer those towns over others, but because it might help you to picture your possible life as a small-town resident: not just toiling away at some grim job as a displaced person, but as a citizen out having fun with your neighbors.

Comments on promising regions of the following states are presented in alphabetical order by state.

Illinois

Illinois is a state that has rich natural resources and serious political problems, with considerable hostility between the rural "Greater Appalachian" south and the megalopolitan north. The state's government is unusually corrupt, with four ex-governors (of both parties) in the past 50 years going to prison, and its finances are

constantly a mess. There's a high chance Illinois will be the first state of the Union to go bankrupt. Population has been declining, probably because people are fed up with the mismanagement.

If you don't already live in the Chicago metro area, by all means don't move there. The southwestern towns that form the eastern part of the St. Louis metro area should also be avoided; as a region, the area has serious problems including crime, bad governance, and powerful industries that put out horrific air pollution. Should the Union break up, I have suggested elsewhere that there would be circumstances in which ceding the bottom end of Illinois to the Confederate states in a land swap would maximize overall welfare and avoid violence. If you want to stay out of the Appalachian region, avoid Carbondale and small towns around the same latitude.

That leaves a lot of area in the central part of the state to consider. Some of the states we are considering, outside one or two over-developed metro areas, have huge rural areas studded with only a few cities of modest size, 10,000 to 20,000 or so at most, which limits the available jobs and services. Illinois has multiple downstate population centers of over 100,000 people. Kurtz et al. (2020) calculated that most of the urban areas have fairly large foodsheds at present but, as in many places, switching to a low-meat diet would make all of them locally supportable. Therefore, if you want or need to live in a larger city, Illinois could be a good choice. Several medium-sized metro areas have potential:

- The Quad Cities in the northwest include Moline, East Moline, and Rock Island in Illinois and Davenport and Bettendorf in Iowa, which all together have a population of nearly 400,000, though individual towns are in the mid-five figures. The economy is accordingly diverse; the biggest employers on the Illinois side include the Rock Island Arsenal, John Deere agricultural machinery factories, and the medical industry. Moline has a branch campus of Western Illinois University with undergraduate and graduate programs in a few subject areas. Rock Island is the home of a Hindu temple and the Rock

Island Grand Prix, a famous karting street race; there is a botanical garden.

- Champaign-Urbana (or "Chambana," about 130,000 people combined) is the home of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a major research university with an excellent performing arts center, and Parkland College, an excellent community college. The medical, high-tech, and software industries employ many people. Chambana is known as a relatively green metro area with an active music and restaurant scene. Both halves have some big-city problems, including crime, drugs, and sprawl; property taxes are much higher in Urbana, but it is a Tree City with many attractive older neighborhoods. There is an Amtrak station.
- Bloomington-Normal (also about 130,000 people combined) is the home of Illinois State University, a public ice-skating facility, an annual Shakespeare festival, the oldest continuously running Passion Play in the U.S., and much more. Major employers in the fairly diverse regional economy include insurance and financial services (State Farm Insurance has a huge presence) and manufacturing (recently including Rivian, which builds electric trucks to be used by Amazon). Has an Amtrak station.
- Springfield (115,000 people) is the state's capital. State government and the medical industry (including a medical school and insurance industry offices) are the largest employers; there is also manufacturing and transportation. Higher education includes a state university campus and a good-sized community college. Springfield is the home of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, and there is some Honest Abe tourism. There are many parks and urban cultural amenities. Housing has been very affordable for a biggish city. Has an Amtrak station.

Illinois cities have had problems with chronic economic depression in the past. Most seem to have improved of late (pre-pandemic), though the state as a whole still has above-average unemployment

rates. Among the larger cities, Decatur in central Illinois and Peoria to the north still have particularly high unemployment (and crime) so are not recommended unless a job or outside income is guaranteed. However, in general the downstate cities also have affordable costs of living. Several, especially Champaign-Urbana, have universities that might provide jobs for academics, but the state system is not in great financial shape due to the state's chronic issues. Smaller cities and larger towns with potential, which may often be cheaper and pleasanter, include:

- Quincy, at the central west edge of Illinois on the Mississippi, has about 40,000 people, in a metro area of about 77,000. It is the northernmost river port with year-round barge traffic and is noted for a Germa historic district and a lively arts scene. There are several manufacturing employers in the town. So many jobs have been available of late that the town was offering incentives to attract new residents. Quincy has an Amtrak station and a town bus service that covers the denser areas with four peculiar routes. Low-lying areas flood frequently.
- Galesburg in the northwest (about 30,000 people) has long been a center of the railroad industry, which *should* take on more importance as fossil fuel declines because of its greater efficiency relative to highway shipping and traffic, and BNSF Railway is a major employer. It is the home of a railroad festival, which includes a model railroad festival, and railroad museum and hall of fame. Has an Amtrak station (unsurprisingly) and a limited, but very cheap town bus service.
- Danville, a town of about 30,000 on the Indiana state line, is on the shore of Lake Vermilion, popular for jet-skiing and water-skiing. Industries include tourism (with plenty of Lincoln history in the area) as well as manufacturing, construction, food processing, and professional services. It has a community college, orchestra, opera, and theater companies, an annual hot-air balloon festival, and decent local bus service.
- Charleston and Mattoon are two southeasterly towns located close together that have close to 40,000 people between them.

Employers include education (Eastern Illinois University, Lakeview College of Nursing, Lake Land College), health care, and food processing, though several manufacturing plants have closed recently. Mattoon is the home of the Rural King headquarters and has an Amtrak stop.

- Jacksonville, west of Springfield, has about 19,000 people. Manufacturing (including Ferris wheel maker Eli Bridge) is important to the local economy, and some plants have closed recently. Jacksonville is home to Illinois' School for the Deaf and School for the Visually Impaired. It has a symphony and theater and is known for its historic Portuguese-American community and 11 pipe organs.
- Effingham, in south-central Illinois, has less than 13,000 people but sits at the junction of two major highways and two rail lines, so catering to travelers is a major part of the local economy. It's for the giant 198-foot steel cross put up at the highway junction. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Taylorville is a south-central town of about 11,000 near Springfield and Lake Shelbyville. Economic opportunities are limited and include tourism, with quite a few charming shops and restaurants clearly meant to cater to outsiders. Marketed as a charming small town, has an annual Chillifest. Almost all white.

There are three Amtrak lines in Illinois. All run from Chicago variously southwestward, but there are some "thruway" routes that connect some cities having downstate stations. Most, but not all, of the bigger cities have at least indirect connections allowing access to public transport. There are bus services from many places to Chicago and St. Louis, and Greyhound has stops in 31 cities and towns, including all cities mentioned above, but hardly any downstate smaller towns. However, it must be admitted that Illinois' public transportation is neither the best nor the easiest in the region.

There are many small towns and villages in Illinois. These would not be suitable for most migrants, but if you should happen to be a farmer, or want to work in a business supporting agriculture, this

would be a good state to live in. It has very productive agriculture, with some of the world's finest topsoil, although many local communities are stupidly allowing developers to pave over it.

Iowa

Iowa is a state primarily devoted to agriculture. Though this has downsides, like the political dominance of agribusiness, it also means that there is plenty of local food supply potential and a hard-working, pragmatic ethos. Education is traditionally valued in Iowa. It has ranked among the best states for K-12 public education, though the GOP government is undercutting public education at the moment, and there are 42 cities or towns of over 4000 people that have at least one college. This makes it a good place to raise kids, though if you want your child to experience cultural diversity growing up, your choices of residence will be more limited. The state has many virtues and can be recommended, for those whose personalities suit the local culture, with little or no reservation. Marche (2022a) believes that it would join a Red nation after a breakup of the U.S., but I am optimistic that he will be proven wrong.

Most parts of Iowa are pleasant, though if you are a member of a minority group, you'd probably want to live in one of the "big cities." There are 13 cities of over 40,000 people in Iowa. A few have red flags, but most are in good shape economically and socially and would make excellent homes.

- Des Moines, the central capital, is the largest, with over 200,000 people, and three others are Des Moines suburbs; the whole metro area is about 700,000 people. Major industries include insurance, finance, agribusiness, publishing, and tire manufacture. Has almost a full range of big-city amenities: convention center, science center, botanical garden, zoo, many arts and sports, numerous festivals, and a four-mile downtown skywalk network.
- Davenport and the much smaller Bettendorf, along the Mississippi River in the east, have about 140,000 people between them. They are part of the Quad Cities discussed

above under Illinois. Industries include food processing, manufacturing, trade, education, and health care. The metro area has all the arts, cultural and sporting amenities expected of a medium-sized metropolis. Davenport hosts jazz and blues festivals and has access to Amtrak via a connecting bus.

- Dubuque (about 60,000 people) is also along the Mississippi, a little farther north at the south end of the Driftless Area (see below). The scenic countryside makes tourism a major business; there is also higher education, health care, and manufacturing (including a John Deere plant), and the economy has been very good in recent years. Dubuque is known for its historic architecture and recently redeveloped port, and is the home of the Colts Drum and Bugle Corps. Most residents are Catholic, but there are many Protestant churches, a synagogue, a mosque, several religious colleges, and three seminaries. (It is, however, generally liberal politically.) Dubuque has received many awards for livability.
- Cedar Rapids (137,000 people), in the central east on the Cedar River, is known as a center of art and culture. Grain processing, other agribusiness, and aerospace are the biggest industries. Cedar Rapids calls itself the "City of Five Seasons," the fifth season being the extra time one gets to enjoy the other four because of the short local commuting times. It hosts Iowa's African-American Museum, the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, and a museum having the world's largest collection of Grant Wood paintings. It is home to Islamic Services of America, which does halal certification, and the country's oldest mosque and Muslim cemetery.
- Iowa City (75,000 people) is south of Cedar Rapids, located on the Iowa River. It is home to the University of Iowa; the university and health care institutions are major employers, and there is some manufacturing. The city hosts several writing programs, workshops, and festivals. Despite the snowy winter weather, many residents commute to work by walking, cycling, or bus, so that the city has an unusually low rate of commuting by private car.

- Waterloo (67,000 people) and Cedar Falls (41,000 people) are sister cities in the northeastern quadrant of the state, located on the Cedar River. Cedar Falls is home to the University of Northern Iowa; manufacturing and agribusiness provide local jobs. It is known for its underground music scene and superb internet service, with broadband provided as a public utility by the municipally owned power company. Waterloo is known for its gross racial inequities and higher level of segregation than any other Iowa city with a significant Black population. You can guess which one is recommended and which isn't.
- Ames (66,000 people), north of Des Moines, hosts Iowa State University, the state's land-grant university, a U.S. Department of Energy materials research and development facility, and the state Department of Transportation headquarters. Manufacturing and high-tech jobs are available; unemployment is extremely low, though rent is becoming less affordable. The public library is very good indeed for a city of modest size.

Pretty much all of the above cities are subject to flooding in "extreme" weather, often spectacularly so. Iowa is very flat. Avoid low-lying or floodplain housing and be sure to store some drinking water wherever you live. Other than that, Iowa cities' sustainability is generally excellent. None have metastasized beyond what can reasonably be supported by the produce of the surrounding rural areas, and they will be in position to provide urban services to those areas.

Iowa has another 10 small cities in the 20,000-40,000 range, and many more small towns, potentially suitable for those who are able to get work and fit in. The most interesting small cities and larger towns outside the previously named metro areas might include the following:

- Mason City (27,000 people), in northern Iowa on the Winnebago River, has a diverse manufacturing industry. It is the home of the plant that makes Jell-O brand refrigerated pudding, as well as plants making doors, cabinetry, and cement. Several years ago it rejected a proposal to build a huge pork

slaughterhouse. It is known for its music scene and collection of Prairie School architecture. The community college, the oldest in Iowa, is ranked among the top 10% nationwide.

- Newton (15,000 people), in south-central Iowa, formerly had Maytag as a major employer. After Whirlpool bought Maytag and outsourced the manufacturing to Mexico, Newton made great efforts to rebuild the town's economy, attracting many new employers. Green manufacturing, including of wind turbines, is encouraged. Maytag Dairy Farms still makes famous hand-made blue cheese, but was recently bought by a private equity fund so may not last much longer. Newton has an active arts and theater community and is home to the Iowa Speedway, the only NASCAR-owned short track west of the Mississippi.
- Indianola (16,000 people), south of Des Moines, is the home of the Des Moines Metro Opera. It is also home to the National Balloon Classic, National Balloon Museum, and U.S. Ballooning Hall of Fame. It is close enough to Des Moines that housing is a bit pricey, but overall cost of living is reasonable.
- Waverly (10,000 people) is in the central northeast. Insurance and manufacturing (Nestlé) are major employers. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has strong numbers here.
- Grinnell, in central Iowa, has less than 10,000 people; it is the home of a highly-ranked liberal arts college. Other businesses include insurance and manufacturing. There are two retirement communities.
- Pella (10,000 people) in southern Iowa is known for its Dutch immigrant heritage, local Dutch dialect, annual tulip festival, and working windmill.
- Oskaloosa (11,000 people) in southern Iowa hosts a variety of small manufacturers and the C. L. Barnhouse music publishing firm. It is home to the annual Southern Iowa Fair.
- Fairfield (10,000 people) in the southeast was the home of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation community, now separated as Maharishi Vedic City, and hosts the associated Maharishi International University. Fairfield has

numerous small or startup employers in manufacturing, software, and telecommunications, many started by TM practitioners, as well as the now somewhat infamous Cambridge Investment Research. The town is interested in pursuing sustainability.

- Decorah, in the extreme northeast in the Driftless Area, is the largest town in its largely agricultural county at little over 8000 people. It was settled by Norwegian immigrants and is home to Luther College, a Lutheran-affiliated senior community, an excellent Norwegian-American museum, and an annual Nordic Fest. It also hosts Seed Savers Exchange, the Raptor Resource Center, and a fish hatchery. Major fields of employment are education, manufacturing, and medicine; there is also a building rock supplier. It's more liberal than the surrounding countryside.

Iowa is a conservative state but traditionally known for its active public participation in politics and relatively honest government. There has not been a serious problem with gerrymandering, so people can live in whatever community suits them without being disenfranchised. However, aggressive new vote-suppressing and voter-purging laws (Democracy Docket 2021, Foley 2021), implemented during a pandemic despite the lack of problems in the last election, may presage more corrupt government to come.

People of color should avoid the ruby-red northwestern quarter of the state, whose residents until recently kept re-electing an increasingly open and dimwitted white nationalist Congressman, as well as Waterloo. Best to avoid very rural areas in general, unless you wish to farm, as the political power of agribusiness means you could end up living downwind of an ill-maintained multimillion-gallon manure lagoon. Small towns with high Hispanic populations who have 100% poverty rates are probably dominated by meatpacking corporations and will assume new Latino residents exist to cut up chicken; stay away from these unless you are in fact looking for a meatpacking job.

The problems caused by unsustainable Big Ag aside, there are many very pleasant small towns in Iowa. The northeastern Driftless Area is notable for its beautiful landscapes and welcoming, arts-friendly culture (Lyons 2015). About 99% of Iowa's landscape is human-altered (the vast majority farmland, the rest developed). This small tristate region, which was unglaciated in the last Ice Age so has some terrain too steep to plow, is one of the few places where there is much real scenery. (There are, however, many small state parks elsewhere.) The Driftless Area does have a tourism industry, but it is not so tourism-dependent as to make being a permanent resident unpleasant or unaffordable.

A combination of four private companies provides fairly good statewide intercity bus service to larger communities, but there is almost no long-distance service in the northern third of the state (above Sioux City, Ft. Dodge, Waterloo, and Dubuque, which all have service) except for a line up the middle of the state. Iowa has one Amtrak line crossing the southern part of the state. Unfortunately, the towns it serves are either very small or less promising for other reasons, so unless you plan to do a lot of traveling that criterion should get less weight.

What makes Iowa special, despite the current corporate influence, is that it represents probably the greatest flourishing of the community-minded, pragmatic, primarily rural "Midlands" culture. There must be many people, perhaps from smaller communities in climate red zones, who would find that delightful, and worth fighting to preserve as America declines. If you find the idea miserably boring, look somewhere else. People who move here ought to be willing to pitch in and become part of the community.

Maine

Mainers have traditionally been a special breed. Many do very hard work in harsh environments on land or sea. The region is poor and insular, with a distinctive culture and accent (notwithstanding the recent "Southernification" of rural areas), and outsiders stick out. If you're going to move to Maine from anyplace farther away than New Hampshire, show up wearing Carhartts and be ready to work hard

without complaining for a long time to fit in. The biggest city is Portland, which at 68,000 people is hardly a teeming metropolis. I exclude ridiculously expensive suburbs of Portland from consideration, but housing is pricey in the state in general, and anyplace that's farther south and has ocean views is substantially costlier than inland towns. The options that might seem most reasonable to the middle or working classes include the following, which are mostly well above sea level except as noted.

- Portland is a coastal city with more professional jobs and cultural diversity than anywhere else in the state. It is a charming historic town with many amenities, gorgeous scenery, and fairly tolerant culture. The economy includes banking, finance, tourism, shipping, fishing, health care, manufacturing, advertising, and media or publishing. It is home to a public university campus, a law school, and the Maine College of Art. Professional salaries and the presence of rich New Yorkers have raised rent and housing prices to the point of being burdensome for the working classes. There is a regional bus service that includes routes to several suburbs, and an Amtrak stop.
- South Portland (26,000 people), also on the coast, is even pricier than Portland and also charming. The economy emphasizes retail, shipping, and manufacturing (including of semiconductors, with one business imposing large recent layoffs that may impact the economy). It has its own small bus service and a free beach (which, it seems, is hard to find in this area). There is a community college. While most of Portland is well above sea level, South Portland is a bit lower-lying and its shipping infrastructure might go underwater at some point.
- Westbrook (20,000 people) is a suburb just to the west of Portland, also pricey. The economy includes manufacturing (notably Idexx Laboratories), health care, and energy.
- Windham (18,000 people) is half an hour northwest of Portland. It's also expensive, quiet and pleasant. Many residents commute to jobs in other communities. Local jobs

(many filled by commuters from other towns, who perhaps can't afford to live in Windham) are mostly in retail and services, government, health care and education, and a modest amount of manufacturing.

- Biddeford and Saco are south of Portland; both are historic mill towns. Biddeford (over 22,000 people), a coastal town, has limited jobs, often in service industries, and reported drug problems; nevertheless, housing prices are pretty high. The economy includes retail and tourism, health care, education (a private university with an osteopathic medical school), and telecommunications. The town is very white but pretty liberal.
- Saco (20,000 people) likewise has fairly high housing prices, including rent, but not necessarily wages. The economy includes tourism, manufacturing (including defense), seafood processing, retail, and education (including the private Thornton Academy). There is an Amtrak stop.
- Brunswick (22,000 people) is on the shore of Casco Bay northeast of Portland. It offers plenty of scenery and a pleasant small town. Housing is fairly expensive. The economy includes health care, manufacturing (including aerospace), a facility of the Bath Iron Works shipyard, IT, retail, and education (the small, historic Bowdoin College, a community college branch campus). Has an Amtrak stop.
- Lewiston and Auburn are north of Portland, well inland. Lewiston (37,000 people) is the second-largest city in Maine and has markedly lower housing prices than the southern coastal cities. It has a strong French Canadian cultural influence, and some Somali immigrants who have opened businesses and run farms. The diverse economy includes health care, food processing, distribution, banking and insurance, IT, manufacturing, advertising, and hospitality. There is a state university branch campus and two private institutions. Parts of the town are rundown, and the schools may not be great. The bus system is shared with Auburn.
- Auburn (24,000 people) has issues similar to Lewiston if less severe: low wages, some drug problems, schools may not be

fantastic. However, it's nice enough to be a good home to many. The economy emphasizes health care, retail and other services, government jobs, and manufacturing (which has greatly declined over time). There is a community college. The bus system is shared with Lewiston.

- Augusta (19,000 people), the capital, is farther north. It has the same poverty-related issues - rundown neighborhoods, drugs, an elevated crime rate - and some suggest that minorities might not feel welcome. The economy includes state government employment, distribution, retail, health care, energy, manufacture, food processing, and education. Augusta is home to the University of Maine at Augusta. There's a Thruway connection to Amtrak.
- Bangor (32,000 people) represents the northeasternmost densely populated area in Maine; there's a lot of land north of the Bangor/Orono area but communities are almost all tiny (see below). Poverty, drugs, and homelessness are troublesome enough in Bangor that property crime is well above average; housing is affordable compared to the coastal communities, but maybe not for the many low-wage workers. The economy depends primarily on health care, retail and services, banking and finance, and manufacturing. Bangor has a University of Maine branch campus, two small private colleges, and a graduate seminary. The town is inland and most of the historic buildings have been lost, making it relatively unappealing to tourism; perhaps to compensate, a large casino has been built. Bangor hosts the annual State Fair. There's a Thruway connection to Amtrak.
- Orono (11,000 people) is north of Bangor, located on two rivers. It's a college town, home of the University of Maine, whose students about equal the townies in number. Education is by far the largest employment sector, and most of the rest is health care, retail, and services; there's very little manufacturing. Orono has a pleasant downtown, with a few craft breweries, and low crime. There's a Thruway connection to Amtrak.

- Two relatively large communities in the extreme northeast end of the state are Presque Isle and Caribou. Presque Isle (9000 people) has been declining in population. This is the home of the Aroostook Band of Micmac, but the town's population is very white. Housing is cheap (let's not think about heating bills), but wages are low. The economy includes health care, retail, agriculture, tourism (winter snowmobiling activities) and manufacturing. There's a tiny University of Maine branch campus, a small private university, and a community college. There's not much to do, but generally the community is safe and friendly.
- Caribou (7000 people) is similar but smaller and with fewer amenities. It's almost 100% white. Agriculture, agribusiness, and food processing are major employers, but there is also tourism, retail, health care, manufacturing, and IT. There is, surprisingly given the town's size and location, a well-used performing arts center. Schools are well regarded especially for their music program, and in summer there are regular public music events.

There are half a dozen bus companies that together provide services to most of the larger towns in Maine (including Presque Isle and Caribou), but information is not conveniently accessible, so trips from or to less-served communities would require some planning.

Michigan

In Michigan one should avoid the entire southeastern Detroit metropolitan area, extending to Ann Arbor, Pontiac, and Flint, as well as Dearborn. The legislature is minority-ruled by the GOP. Not content with gerrymandering to reduce this region's influence, some Republicans following the 2020 election proposed to throw out all Detroit residents' ballots or take over their election boards, essentially because they allowed too many non-white urbanites to vote. They are now replacing "normal" Republicans on urban counties' boards of canvassers (whose duty it is to certify local voting results) with racists, conspiracy nuts, and advocates of a coup d'êtat in 2020

(Levine 2021). A few years ago, when the city government of Flint was in financial trouble, the legislature imposed a white Republican outside manager who forced the city to switch to a cheaper water source. We all know how that went. The opinion of the ruling party is that the residents of this region, being mostly non-white, do not deserve to have drinking water that won't poison them. Move there, and you will be a target.

Detroit is actually poised to undergo an urban renaissance, if the legislature doesn't find a way to stop them. The city has lost enough population that there is a lot of vacant land, and rather than forcing it to remain covered with derelict buildings and garbage, city leaders are encouraging urban farming. The young activists who are working to find ways for the city to survive and thrive can find housing only because old buildings are so cheap. A bunch of Westerners moving in and jacking up the property costs might seriously interfere with long-time residents' efforts to revitalize the city. So really, please don't move there and contribute to gentrification.

Day and Hall (2016) think that the entire southern half of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, say everything south of Saginaw Bay, will have sustainability challenges. Kurtz et al. (2020) agree that there would be enough nearby farm and pasture land to feed the southern urban regions only if diets were much less meat-heavy. Under present circumstances, very large foodsheds would be required for the southwestern metro areas as well as the eastern. However, the largest southwestern cities are of modest size compared to the Detroit megalopolis. There are no cities of any size in the northern half of Michigan, so if you desire urban life in Michigan, the southwest is your best bet. As I noted earlier, perhaps the best way to think about migration is to seek medium-term sustainability, not long-term. In the long term, the Grand Rapids metro region is not sustainable, but in the short to medium term, which might be the rest of your life, you'd be much better off there than in Los Angeles or Phoenix. Some cities in Michigan are still suffering badly from the decline of manufacturing, with high unemployment rates. Larger cities that appear to offer opportunities for migrants include:

- Grand Rapids is only 200,000 people, but its greater metropolitan area exceeds a million. The economy is diverse, e.g., advanced health care, manufacturing (notably, of furniture), agribusiness, education, brewing, and Christian publishing. There are some branch university campuses and a community college (as well as several religious colleges and seminaries). As expected of a large metro, there is a wide range of arts, sports, and culture. There is a good-sized metro area transit system and an Amtrak stop. It seems that the recent public execution of a Black suspect by a city cop is only an extreme example of decades of police harassment and abuse of African-Americans, so this may not be the safest city for minorities—though again, we're in America; I don't know where I could suggest someone move to have zero risk of encountering racist cops.
- Wyoming (76,000 people) is part of the Grand Rapids metro area. It had been in decline after the closure of a GM plant, but the economy has improved. There's still a good diversity of manufacturing, as well as food processing, retail, distribution and shipping, education, and health care. Cost of living and crime are both reasonable.
- Kentwood (54,000 people) is another suburb of Grand Rapids. Housing prices are a bit higher than in Wyoming, and some neighborhoods are nicer than others, though overall the town is considered pretty pleasant. It seems like many residents work in Grand Rapids, and many local businesses are service-oriented (e.g., restaurants). Some city parks offer free wi-fi.
- Holland (34,000 people) is at the margin of the Grand Rapids area. It has a variety of manufacturing and food processing employers including the world's largest pickle factory, a couple of university branch campuses, and a seminary. Many residents are Dutch-American, and there is a huge, popular tulip festival. The town has a symphony orchestra and chorus and a bus system. It's known as the City of Churches, and has a conservative culture; diversity is limited.

- Kalamazoo (75,000 people) in the southwest is home to Western Michigan University and a community college. Major sectors of the economy include manufacturing, medicine, and life sciences. Craft brewing and distilling are popular. The metro area has many cultural resources and an Amtrak stop. The "Kalamazoo Promise," funded by anonymous donors, has provided thousands of Kalamazoo public school graduates with funds for tuition and fees at Michigan colleges, universities, or skilled trade programs. Students who were in Kalamazoo schools since kindergarten get 100% of tuition and fees covered, while those enrolled from 9th grade onwards, the minimum, get 65%. If you have young children and limited means, this could be a serious draw.
- Portage, nearly 50,000 people, is near Kalamazoo. A major focus of the local economy is the medical industry, including health care, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and biotech; the local Pfizer plant produced a large amount of COVID vaccine. There are plenty of outdoor activities. The vast majority of residents seem pretty satisfied.
- Lansing, a city of close to 120,000, is the state capital. Government, education, insurance, healthcare, and auto manufacturing are major employers. Lansing is home to a law school and a community college. It has all the urban amenities; there are many festivals, including an annual African-American Heritage Festival. Internet comments suggest that the town is livable but nothing particularly special. There is an Amtrak stop.
- East Lansing (48,000 people) is a college town, home to the large Michigan State University, which has medical and veterinary schools. Crime is lower than in Lansing and housing more expensive. The downtown is being rapidly developed and densely populated, while many homeowning neighborhoods have gotten renting prohibited, mostly to exclude students. There is a diversity of cultural organizations. Bus service is shared with Lansing, and the town has an Amtrak stop.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) reports that most of the counties along the western side of Michigan's Lower Peninsula are growing in population, not only urban counties, suggesting that they are doing a good job of keeping their young people employed or attracting residents from elsewhere. The northern part of the Lower Peninsula, especially inland, is very rural and very conservative, with few opportunities. Smaller towns in the Lower Peninsula seldom have very diverse economies, so prospective residents would need to be confident of being able to find work and adapt to small-town culture. If that's you, small towns like these could be worth considering:

- Grand Haven (11,000 people) is a lakeshore community in the Grand Rapids area that hosts a Coast Guard facility. Tourism is important to the local economy, and there are many outdoor recreational opportunities. The town has wireless internet available everywhere, though not free. Residents indicate that it's a friendly community, but conservative with religious expectations, not a place where your kids would hear about evolution in the schools. Popular with retirees, which is perhaps why housing costs are higher than in other towns. Very white.
- Bay City, at the shore of Saginaw Bay, is a city of 33,000 that currently has real socioeconomic problems, but might be well placed for the future, on a river and having a Great Lakes port. Bay City, the similarly sized Midland, and the larger Saginaw form the Greater Tri-Cities Region, whose economy is largely dependent upon manufacturing and tourism. Saginaw is still having serious problems and is not recommended. Bay City's largest employer is the medical center. It has many civic activities and a bus system.
- Midland, to its west, is a city of about 42,000 boasting a civic arena with three skating rinks, botanical garden, and nature center; also a nuclear power plant. Manufacturing is the biggest component of the economy; Dow Chemical was founded here. Unlike Bay City, public transport seems to be limited to dial-a-ride.

- Mount Pleasant (25,000 people) is a college town that is home to Central Michigan University, the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College, and a community college. It is partly within the territory of the Isabella Indian Reservation, which owns a casino and resort. The Saginaw-Chippewa tribe conducts programs to revitalize the Anishinaabe language and holds a variety of cultural events for Native Americans.
- Alma is a town of 9000 people, 16 miles from Mount Pleasant, that has a small liberal arts college. Jobs are limited, with education and healthcare the most common fields. Alma has a charming traditional downtown and holds an annual Highland Festival. Residents warn that it is conservative and has some pollution issues.
- At the west, on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, Ludington is a harbor town of 8000 people whose economy centers on tourism and manufacturing. It is the home port of a car ferry that crosses the lake to Manitowoc, Wisconsin. There are two historic lighthouses and plenty of businesses aimed at tourists, from charter fishing to boutique shops and craft beer and wine. There is a community college. Some residents complain online about low wages and lack of affordable housing, though average rents remain reasonable by national standards.
- Manistee (6000 people), on Lake Michigan, is less popular than Ludington but likewise has an economy based on tourism and manufacturing, especially of salt, an essential commodity. A national forest, state park, and dunes wilderness are nearby. There are several small museums, a historic downtown, a bird sanctuary, a semi-professional baseball team, and much public land accessible for hunting in the vicinity. Residents warn that non-white and LGBTQ people might not feel comfortable here.
- Traverse City (15,000 people), a port on Grand Traverse Bay in the northwest, is a major producer of cherries and grapes; there are over 50 wineries in the area. Tourism, featuring a week-long cherry festival and a tall ship berthed at the port, is the biggest sector of the economy. Health care, insurance, manufacturing, and tech also provide jobs. There is a

community college with two campuses, one of which is the only U.S. maritime academy on freshwater and prepares students to earn First Class Great Lakes Pilotage with a bachelor's degree. The Dennos Museum is known for its collection of Inuit art. Recently, efforts to condemn racist acts by school students met with aggressive backlash from right-wing parents, but the town tends Democratic.

Michigan's Upper Peninsula could be a lovely home for a select few who like rural life (and very deep snow) and can work and assimilate in a small town. Located between Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, and with numerous lakes, it is a fisherman's paradise. The largest city is Marquette, at less than 21,000 people. Ethnic diversity in the UP is not zero, but it isn't high; white people might feel more comfortable and be less likely to die of vitamin D deficiency. Towns that might appeal to some include the following:

- Marquette's economy is centered on Northern Michigan University, tourism, and port shipping, primarily of iron ore. There is other employment in health care (the UP's best hospital), insurance, medical technology, communications, and a prison. It has a bus system that connects to Ishpeming. There are five breweries and many small festivals. Housing is costlier than in the smaller towns.
- Sault Ste. Marie (13,000 people) is one of the oldest colonial cities in the U.S., founded by Jesuits in 1668. It is on the St. Mary's River, the juncture between Lakes Superior and Huron, where the busy Soo Locks allow shipping to bypass the river rapids. An international bridge connects it to its sister city of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Tourism is the biggest industry; there is a Chippewa-owned casino. Sault Ste. Marie is the home of a tiny state university/community college, which has limited programs but offers one of only three four-year fire science programs in the U.S. It hosts an annual 500-mile one-day snowmobile race; skiing and watching hockey are popular winter activities.

- Houghton, with less than 8000 people, is on the Keweenaw waterway. Its Portage Lift Bridge provides the only land link between the north and south portions of the Keweenaw Peninsula. Tourism is a major industry, and jobs are limited. Houghton is known for long winters and often very deep snow. It hosts many winter sporting events, and the local university, Michigan Tech, a primarily engineering school, has a winter carnival. For people who love remote rural towns and the great outdoors.
- Ironwood is even smaller, about 5000 people, but has two theaters, two dance companies, and a music festival. A former mining town, it now depends upon tourism, lumber, and manufacturing. Incomes are low, but housing is cheap. Ironwood is the home of bakers of the Cornish pasty, a traditional dish of meat and vegetables in a dough pocket, which the UP has for some reason embraced and made their own.
- Ishpeming, similarly tiny, is the home of the National Ski Hall of Fame and the regional musical-comedy group Da Yoopers. It is recommended by some as a cheaper alternative to Marquette, since that city can be reached by bus when needed. Open-pit iron mining has been an important local industry, resulting in environmental damage and pollution, and other mining operations are in development. However, there is still plenty of unspoiled nature to see; tourism employs an increasing number of people. Education, health care, and manufacturing provide other jobs.

At present, three of the named towns have small hospitals and one has a clinic, all five have city libraries, and Marquette has a commercial airport. However, big-city amenities are few, and in the smaller towns, a very rural culture should be expected. Tourism is important to the UP economy, but the favorable location on two Great Lakes means that it should be possible to substitute more essential activities as the era of mass tourism fades away.

Michigan has a fairly good network of intercity bus services. These connect several of the UP communities to the outside world (via Wisconsin or the bridge to the Lower Peninsula) and connect many of the larger towns in the Lower Peninsula to southern cities, though omitting most of the western and easternmost communities for some reason.

Minnesota

Over half of Minnesota's population, about 2.9 million people, live in the southeastern metropolitan area of Minneapolis-St. Paul. The Twin Cities, with about 700,000 people, are surrounded by sprawling suburbs, often having over 50,000 people apiece. As for many other metro areas in this region, Kurtz et al. (2020) find that a foodshed of between 500 and 1000 km radius is required to feed this area now, but that local supply would be possible with a diet lighter on meat. Still, it's already larger than desirable for a metro area, and known for police brutality. If you insist on living in a megalopolis, this might be better than most; otherwise, look elsewhere.

Gerrymandering is not a big problem in Minnesota. The northeast, from Duluth north and east, is mostly rural yet fairly liberal. Large chunks of rural central and southwestern Minnesota, and parts of the north, are solidly conservative. However, as noted, I don't see this as an automatic reason for most liberals or moderates to avoid towns within those areas. Most are somewhat lacking in diversity. Nobody should think that means non-white people would automatically be safer in the big city (ask Philando Castile's family about that), but Trump made great efforts to win Minnesota by ranting against Somali immigrants at rallies and got some enthusiastic audiences. If you're not white, checking out the local political climate and demographics would be a good idea.

There are only three cities over 50,000 population outside the Minneapolis metro area. All of them are attractive destinations for people who need good-sized communities, especially to supply professional or academic employment.

- St. Cloud, a city of about 70,000 in central Minnesota on the Mississippi River, has been lumped into the Minneapolis region, but is actually separated from it by a good stretch of land with low population density. Employers include medical institutions and education; there is a state university and a community college. Granite mining and agriculture are regionally important industries. It's received an award as a "livable city" and is noted for its many parks and pleasant public spaces. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Duluth on the northeastern border has over 85,000 people and, with Superior, Wisconsin, has a broader metro area including almost 280,000 people. It is located on the shore of Lake Superior and the hills above, so there are many hilly streets, and it hosts the busiest port on the Great Lakes, accessible to oceangoing ships. (This is a *very* desirable feature for the future.) The city seeks to attract tourism, and has renovated the downtown to emphasize its charm. Popular activities include hiking, biking, skiing, sailing, surfing, agate hunting on the lakeshore, and fall birdwatching of migrating raptors. Other economic sectors are shipping, health care, banking, education, engineering, and aquatic science. There is a state university branch, an aquarium, and a zoo (where several animals drowned during the last major flooding in 2012).
- Rochester in the southeast has a population of 115,000 in a mostly rural area. It is a center of the medical industry due to the well-regarded (and politically powerful) Mayo Clinic and Hospital. It also hosts a major IBM research and manufacturing facility and manufacturers of trucks, electronics, and foods. There is a community college that hosts a branch of Winona State University. "Thursdays on First" in the summer feature live music, street musicians, and booths set up by local restaurants and artists. The downtown has many skyways and underground tunnels; bicycling is promoted.

There are several cities from 10,000 to 50,000 worth considering:

- Winona (26,000 people) in the southeast is in the charming Driftless Area (see above under Iowa). It overlooks the Mississippi River, with a crossing bridge, and is located on Lake Winona. Manufacturing is important to the economy, with a range of employers including the well-known Watkins home remedies and spices. There is a small state university, Winona State, and the diverse school options include a Montessori school and preschool. Winona is known as the stained glass capital of the United States, with six active studios. Scenery and architecture are lovely, and by Minnesota standards the weather is mild. There is an Amtrak stop.
- Owatonna, of similar size, is in the southeast but outside the Driftless Area. Insurance, manufacturing, and health care are important economic sectors. There is a small community college. According to legend, the local water cured a dying Princess Owatonna, and people travel to Mineral Springs Park to taste the water. (The FDA has not evaluated this claim!) It has an arts center, parks, and a famous hundred-year-old candy store, and hosts the state's largest county fair. (If you don't think county and state fairs are fun, you do NOT know what you're missing, by the way.)
- Mankato (44,000 people) in the south is at the confluence of the Minnesota and Blue Earth Rivers. The region has been growing and prospering in recent years. The largest employers are the Mayo medical chain and Minnesota State University, whose students provide a large enough fraction of Mankato's school-year population to qualify it as a college town; there are also a few small private colleges. Locally quarried stone is a major product, and the town bills itself, perhaps dubiously, as the soybean capital of the world. Mankato has a decent, though recently cut-back, city bus service and a large network of bike trails in outlying areas.
- North Mankato (14,000 people) is smaller, more expensive, and very white. Many residents work in Mankato. There is a community college. Public transportation is limited, making a car desirable.

- St. Peter (12,000 people) is 10 miles north of Mankato. It's home to the state hospital for the dangerously mentally ill. Many or most residents commute to Mankato for work. It's a peaceful town with a conspicuous police presence, well liked by its residents, with many small businesses and medium-city housing prices.
- Alexandria in the west central region is surrounded by hundreds of lakes. It is small (over 13,000 people), but has a fairly diverse economy including tourism, manufacturing, food processing, and health care. There is a modest community college and a regional intercity transit system. Other than the lakes, attractions include a well-used dirt track speedway and the Runestone Museum, centered around the apparently debunked Kensington Runestone. Alexandria is a conservative town with little diversity, but considered an excellent place for (white) families.
- Willmar (21,000 people) is located on a lake. The local economy is strong in agribusiness, from meat processing to biotech; there's a fairly new industrial park hosting some manufacturing businesses. There is a community college. Willmar is pleasant and quiet with affordable housing costs. It has Latin American and some Somali immigrants and is noted to be more diverse than many small towns.
- Moorhead (44,000 people) is on the Red River at Minnesota's western border. It is officially part of the Fargo, South Dakota metro area, and shares a large combined public transit service with Fargo. The area boasts exceptionally rich farmland, and major businesses include agriculture, food processing, education, manufacturing, and corporate headquarters (American Crystal Sugar). Small state university and community college branches and a private Evangelical Lutheran college are among the largest employers. Some Norwegian heritage sites are present, and there's a performing arts center with a summer school.
- Fergus Falls, southeast of Moorhead, has 14,000 people but a fairly diverse economy, including IT and energy as well as the

usual agribusiness, manufacturing, and health care. There is a community college and an arts center. Pretty white.

- Grand Rapids (11,000 people) in the north-central area has an economy traditionally centered on lumber and paper milling; it has diversified into tourism and puts on a variety of festivals and sporting events. Judy Garland was born here, explaining why one of the events is a Wizard of Oz festival. There is a small community college that has only a handful of degree programs, but those include forestry, wildland firefighting, and pulp and paper. If you want to work in the paper industry, this town could be a good place to start.
- Bemidji (15,000 people), is on the southwest shore of Lake Bemidji at the head of the Mississippi River. There are three Native American reservations in the vicinity, and Bemidji is the primary shopping and service center for its region. Over 10% of the population is Native American, and Ojibwe language may be seen and heard. Major economic sectors include health, social services, retail and food services, and professional and technical services; there are three small colleges or universities. The Concordia Language Villages are nearby. Public events include a large, long-running Art in the Park, a dragon boat race, a Winterfest, and the Paul Bunyan Triathlon. Hockey and curling are popular sports.
- Three towns along the southern border are Worthington, Fairmont, and Austin. Worthington (almost 14,000 people) is the westernmost. Agribusiness (meat packing), health care and pharmaceuticals, and education employ many residents. There is a community college branch. Worthington has a substantial Hispanic minority, and some residents complain of racist policing.
- Fairmont (10,000 people) is popular with retirees. There are five lakes, and outdoor recreation is popular. The economy includes health care (a Mayo branch), manufacturing, and food processing. There is a community college. Very white.
- Austin (25,000 people) is home to the Hormel corporation (maker of SPAM tinned meat), a SPAM museum, and the

> Hormel Institute, a cancer research center. Other agribusinesses, health care, education, government, and services contribute to the economy; there is a community college. Austin is on the Cedar River and has suffered repeated flooding, though recently built infrastructure is *supposed* to stop that. It has a good variety of cultural institutions, but the population is not very diverse. There's a county rural transit service.

At the moment, Minnesota has one Amtrak line, which stops in cities including Winona, St. Paul, and St. Cloud, and several private bus services, the regional Jefferson Lines being the best. There is a desire for expanded rail transport, but it has not been funded. Minnesota is a productive agricultural state, about equally split between crops and animal products. If you have a farming background, there are many smaller communities that might suit you.

New York

People conflate New York the city with New York the state. Most of the state, in Woodard's analysis of America's traditional cultural regions, is culturally quite distinct from the City. Historically the state was a center of manufacturing, and it has a good amount of agricultural land that produces many fruits and vegetables. In addition to the New York City metro area, other substantial urban areas include Albany/Schenectady to its north, Buffalo and Rochester to the west with their important lake access, and centrally located Syracuse. Smaller cities are located to the south. As noted above, I suggest that most migration here would best be within-state. NYC is clearly unsustainable for the future and many residents would do themselves a favor by getting out early, and staying in the state would keep them close to family, friends, and colleagues.

The northeastern part of the state is mostly occupied by the Adirondack Mountains. It has rugged terrain and extremely low population density, with small towns located largely in the lower-lying areas. Tourism is of course very important to this region. Given the possible unsustainability of that industry, the region might be depri-

oritized in favor of the south-central to southwestern parts of that state. Some celebrities make their homes, or at least *own* homes, in nice Adirondack resort towns, and wealthier NYC residents might think of that as a good option. I wouldn't suggest it. In heavily tourism-dependent regions there is a profound divide between the rich, often liberal out-of-towners and the working-class, mostly conservative locals who serve their needs. They may like having your business, but they won't usually respect you or see you as part of the community. That could put you in a difficult position someday.

Because there is some tendency for the population density of NYC to spread northwards towards Albany, I suggest that those leaving NYC go substantially farther west. In an earlier chapter I pointed out medium-sized cities including Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse. All three of these are the centers of metropolitan areas that I would normally say were too big and sprawling to consider, unless your comparator was NYC! All have diverse economies and a full range of urban amenities and are certainly more sustainable than NYC.

A much smaller metropolis is Utica (65,000 people in the city proper), whose economy includes manufacture, logistics, transport, tourism, and brewing. It has suffered economically from the collapse of traditional manufacturing, and poverty rates are high, yet crime remains fairly low. There are several small colleges and universities. Utica has welcomed refugees from many countries, including Bosnians, Burmese, and Southeast Asians, so though it is not a huge city it has considerable ethnic, linguistic, and culinary diversity. There is a downtown historic district.

Along the southern border, the cluster including Binghamton, Union, Johnson City, and Endicott has about 250,000 people in its metro area. Binghamton sits at the confluence of two rivers in a mountainous area; there are 11 bridges and many hilly neighborhoods. There are several historical districts, one large. The town declined as factories closed, but it is now positioning itself as a center of high-tech industry including defense, with other sectors including healthcare, services, research, food distribution, and education. Binghamton University, technically in the suburb of Vestal, is a good-sized school, and there is also a community college.

Endicott has had problems with persistent pollution from a former IBM plant.

Most of those cities have at times had high unemployment rates, but that is true of all of the Rust Belt. At recent report, some are doing better than others, though the situation is changing rapidly due to the ongoing pandemic. Smaller cities and towns in the 10,000 to 40,000 range outside the metro areas have had a harder time rebounding after the decline of manufacturing. They often appear to have long-lasting above-average unemployment and poverty rates, high crime and drug problems, and sometimes other issues, such as serious recent histories of racism. A few examples of the better options might be:

- Olean (14,000 people) in the south is on the Allegheny River. Economy includes manufacturing, distribution, and healthcare. There have been several recent corporate facility closures. There is a small community college.
- Corning (11,000 people) in the south on the Chemung River is home to Corning, the manufacturer of glass and ceramic products. Manufacturing and tourism are major economic sectors. There is a community college. Cultural attractions include a historic downtown, the Corning Museum of Glass, the Heritage Village, and the Rockwell Museum. Small town, but enjoyable.
- Auburn (26,000 people) is the site of a maximum-security prison, and corrections is one of the main employments. Others are health care, manufacturing, and education. It has a small community college. The William H. Seward and Harriet Tubman houses, once stops on the Underground Railroad, are national historic sites.
- Amsterdam (18,000 people) to the northwest of Albany has many jobs in distribution, with several major corporate distribution centers in the area. There is a large Hispanic minority, and the town has two Spanish-language Pentacostal churches (as well as a synagogue and a Buddhist temple). Has an Amtrak stop.

These seem the most promising for migrants who don't have a job offer in hand. If you do, and your demographics aren't such as to make you a target, there are other less appealing towns that could be just fine for you. However, if you are migrating from NYC, I don't suggest you consider really small towns unless you have family ties there, because you'll have real trouble fitting in. One of the bigger cities would probably suit you better.

New York has more than half a dozen commercial bus companies operating; Greyhound alone serves most of the listed cities. There are also regional bus services. Amtrak service is relatively limited. One line runs east from Buffalo to Schenectady through Rochester, Syracuse, Rome, Utica, and Amsterdam. A line up the eastern edge of the state to Montréal stops at many quite small towns, clearly for the convenience of tourists from NYC.

Ohio

Ohio is a traditionally industrial Rust Belt state that includes four major cities (Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Toledo), two cities in the 100,000 to 200,000 range (Akron and Dayton), and quite a few smaller cities. Most of the largest cities are situated within much larger, politically fragmented metropolitan areas. The metropolitan areas of Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati each hold over two million people, and those of Toledo, Youngstown, Akron (south of Cleveland), and Dayton (north of Cincinnati) hold several hundred thousand apiece.

Kurtz et al. (2020) estimate that most of Ohio's urban areas could be provisioned within a reasonably sized foodshed if (as usual) a lower-meat diet were to be adopted. Cost of living in Ohio is generally moderate even in the big cities, thanks to the state's blue-collar character. Still, all of these metro areas are larger than will be desirable in a resource-limited future, and new migrants should avoid the biggest ones unless they have special reason to move there. Redistribution of some of the existing populations of those metros to smaller cities and towns might also be beneficial to the people involved.

Ohio has had strongly religious-conservative government of late, making it unclear whether, if the Union broke up, the state would join with the Northeast or the Confederate states. (So if you choose to move here, don't say I didn't warn you.) Ohio is majority-Republican but is also heavily gerrymandered to permit extreme GOP rule. Ohio's citizens passed a constitutional amendment calling for less biased redistricting beginning in 2022. However, it was simply ignored by the Republican legislature, which is now proceeding into the 2022 elections with Congressional and legislative districts that the Ohio Supreme Court repeatedly ruled to be unconstitutional (Levine 2022).

This is distressing to believers in democracy, of course, but on the plus side, it suggests to me that much or most of the population would probably wish to remain part of the Northeast. If Ohio's population really did contain a supermajority of evangelical extremists, the GOP wouldn't feel the need to work so hard to prev-ent so many of the people from having representation in the legislature. It is also possible that Ohio's key geographic position, connecting Michigan and Pennsylvania, would give the state's ruling class leverage to demand special privileges or guarantees if it joined the Northeast, such as local autonomy to impose religious laws, giving it (from some people's perspective) the best of both worlds. I think it is a reasonable presumption that states will survive and retain their current borders for the remainder of the century, even if the Union breaks up. However, if I'm wrong, it's possible that the state of Ohio would split up, with the culturally Appalachian south joining the Confederate states and the north the industrial Northeast. Ohio residents might want to consider how their choices of residence might affect the balance in this perhaps geopolitically critical swing state.

Smaller Ohio towns are usually quite conservative and ethnically homogenous; even mid-sized cities can be up to 96% white. Many have been hit badly by post-industrial decline, and lack of jobs, low wages, poverty, drugs, crime, and infrastructure decay are serious problems. Arriving without a job offer in hand or a plan to make one's own living could be risky. I exclude from mention most very small towns, because a stranger could have little chance of finding

any job, as well as towns that are reported to be particularly unfriendly or lethally manganese-polluted.

Bigger cities also have weak economies compared to urban areas in some other states, but the greater number and variety of businesses might give a hard-working migrant a better chance. I still suggest avoiding the three big C's as just too big. Other large and diverse cities, which all have some local public transit and Greyhound bus service, include the following:

- Dayton (137,644 people) is by one definition the center of a metro area of about a million people, which is beginning to merge with the Cincinnati metro to its south. However, it's well regarded as a place to live. It is diverse, with many faith communities. The economy includes logistics and shipping, engineering, manufacturing (including for the military), healthcare, tourism, insurance and law. Dayton has a state university with a medical school, one of the nation's biggest and best community colleges, and a Catholic university unusually well regarded for its research expertise. The downtown features a wide range of entertainment and cultural venues and the Dayton Dragons minor league baseball team.
- Toledo (271,000 people, but with a smaller surrounding metro area) is a port city on Lake Erie. The economy is still strong in manufacturing (steel, glass, autos, solar panels, etc.); there are several corporate headquarters. Health care is an important employer; the University of Toledo has a medical school. There's also a community college. The port is still active and will likely be more important in future. Cultural resources are as plentiful as in any large city, including a jazz orchestra, a highly-ranked zoo, library, and science museum, a wide variety of sports including women's football and a speedway, multiple weekly newspapers, etc. There is an Amtrak stop.
- Akron (190,000 people with a metro area of about 700,000) is south of Cleveland and their metro areas are beginning to fuse. The economy includes manufacturing (especially rubber and tires, with Goodyear's corporate headquarters located here),

high-tech (especially polymers, with 400 related businesses located in the region), health care, higher education (University of Akron), and a large jewelry company. There are a variety of cultural events and tourist attractions. Local public transit has connections to Cleveland and Canton.

- Canton (71,000 people) is 20 miles south of Akron and their metro areas, too, are starting to blur together. Though manufacturing and rail shipping have declined, the economy is still strong, with usually low unemployment, and diverse, though retail and service are increasingly emphasized. There is a variety of manufacturing, including food processing, and local agribusiness, as well as health care and some insurance and finance. Canton is the home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps. Cultural institutions appear to be very limited compared to most northern cities of similar size.

Probably because of its large population, Ohio has a decent public/private rural intercity bus network, GoBus, which has five routes that serve 29 Ohio cities or towns and Hocking, West Virginia. Promising smaller cities that are on these routes and well away from the sprawl include the following:

- Lancaster (40,000 people) is southeast of Columbus. It has jobs in areas including health care, manufacturing, government, food processing, education, and retail. It has a glass industry museum and historic architecture and hosts an October county fair. It is exceedingly white and reputedly quite conservative.
- Newark (nearly 50,000 people) is east of Columbus and slightly more diverse. It is the home of major Hopewell (2000-year-old Native American) earthworks with astronomical meaning. There are many manufacturing employers and a few corporate headquarters, and a regional university campus/technical college.
- Mansfield (ca. 47,000 people) is in north-central Ohio, midway between Columbus and Cincinnati. It is more diverse than most

Ohio towns. Manufacturing has declined badly but is still important to the economy, as are food processing and health care. The economy is in somewhat rough shape, but cost of living is modest. There is a strong performing arts culture, and a five-day-a-week bus service. Some neighborhoods are extremely right-wing.

- Wooster (about 27,000 people) in the northeast is home to several corporate headquarters, manufacturing plants, a liberal arts college, and Ohio State University agricultural facilities. Agriculture is important in the county, with many Amish farmers. Wooster hosts the county fair, is the center of a local food network, and, thanks to the college, has some performing arts.
- New Philadelphia in the east has over 17,000 people. Manufacturing is the biggest economic sector; medical care and printing also offer jobs. It is known for a small locally owned branch university campus, which has a performing arts department, and a historic park with a wooden carousel. The town appears to be rather dull but small and safe.
- The nearby town of Dover (ca. 13,000 people) might effectively share transit access. Dover has some manufacturing employment, including a large chemical company, and a regional hospital. Parts of the surrounding area are Amish. There are several wineries.
- Cambridge in the east (10,000 people) has several manufacturing employers, but residents report that the job market is poor and wages low. It's historically a glass-manufacturing town and sees tourism from glass collectors as well as history buffs. Reportedly mostly friendly and welcoming.
- Marysville, over 25,000 people in the center-west, is the home of Scotts Miracle-Gro and the biggest Honda Accord factory in the U.S.; other manufacturing, agriculture, and R&D are major industries. The town hosts a variety of summer and fall festivals and a county fair.

- Lima in the west (36,000 people) has a large oil refinery; other employments include manufacturing, healthcare, and government. Lima was hit hard by post-industrial decline and has not yet fully rebounded. There is public transit via a county bus system.
- Van Wert (about 11,000 people) is located at the western edge of the state. Manufacturing, meat processing, insurance, and health care are major employers. Despite its small size, the town has art and performing arts centers, a YMCA and YWCA, and the oldest county library in the U.S; it hosts a county fair. Considered to be dull, peaceful, generally friendly and pleasant.
- Logan in the south has only about 7000 people. It is home to the Columbus Washboard Company and holds an annual washboard music festival. Tourism is a major business, with beautiful local scenery.
- Jackson is a southern town of little over 6000. Manufacturing, often of wood products from local trees, and food processing are central to the county's economy. Jobs are often scarce and low-paying nowadays, and poverty, crime, and drugs are problems. Unfortunately, there are few small towns in Ohio for which that cannot be said at present. This one might appeal to a few people because many residents are of Welsh descent and that heritage is still visible in the local culture.

GoBus is nice, but not everyone can move to places with decent public transportation. If you have a car and expect to have one for the near future, maybe you won't care about that issue for now, anticipating that bus service will improve as the public's ability to drive declines. Here are some promising smaller cities that lack GoBus service:

- Findlay (40,000 people) is south of Toledo, located on the Blanchard River, which tends to flood. The economy includes corporate petroleum and tire headquarters, manufacturing (tires, dishwashers), distribution for several major big-box stores, and retail. There's a community college branch and the University of Findlay, a private college that features programs in pre-

veterinary science and Western and English equestrianism. There are a variety of annual community activities. Findlay has considerable political diversity and is generally well-liked by residents. There is a reasonably priced public dial-a-ride service.

- Bowling Green and Perrysburg are part of the Toledo metro area. Bowling Green (31,000 people) is a college town, but blue-collar enough to host a tractor-pulling contest. Bowling Green State University is the largest employer; there is also diverse manufacturing (automotive and aerospace, chemicals, a fairly broad variety of specialized products including animatronics), food processing, and logistics and distribution. Local events include the well-known Black Swamp Arts Festival, a county fair, and a Winterfest. There is a rather pricey dial-a-ride service.
- Perrysburg (25,000 people), located on the Maumee River, has employment in glass and steel manufacturing. It is reportedly pleasant to live in and still relatively affordable, though housing is above the (low) state average. In warm weather there's a weekly farmers' market with live music in the summer (the 2022 schedule including the "Perrysburg Symphony Orchestra"!). Perrysburg has a dial-a-ride service. There seems to be not much to say about Perrysburg, but if that means there's nothing *bad* to say, that's actually a good sign for people who don't mind a rather dull hometown.
- Defiance (17,000 people) is in the northwest corner of the state. Jobs are limited, though a variety of special districts and zones seek to increase economic activities. Countywide, the biggest economic sector is manufacturing, followed by retail and services, government, and health care; most businesses are small. The town has concluded that it has a shortage of rental housing and is trying to encourage its development, but recognizes that developers won't supply the affordable (<$750) units for which demand would be greatest. Defiance is a pleasant town with a library, some parks, and monthly "coffee with a cop" events. Like Perrysburg, if you prefer small and

boring and have a way to make your living, you might be quite happy here.

- Sandusky (25,000 people) is on Lake Erie midway between Toledo and Cleveland. Tourism, featuring the Cedar Point amusement park (known for its large, fast roller coasters), recreation on the lake and waterfront, and outdoor and indoor waterparks, is the biggest sector of the economy. Sandusky is also the local center for health care, retail, and services. There is still a commercial fishery in this part of the lake, but it's declining due to environmental damage. The town, which was a stop on the Underground Railroad, is still pretty liberal, more diverse than most, and quite charming. Sandusky has metro area public transit, as well as ferry connections, and service by two Amtrak lines.
- Bellefontaine (pronounced "bell fountain"; 14,000 people) is central-western. Local employment includes auto manufacturing, government, and logistics; most of the larger businesses in the county are located in other towns. There are small state and community college satellite campuses. There's not much there, but most residents seem satisfied.
- Boardman (about 40,000 people in the "township") and Austintown (close to 30,000 people) are suburbs of Youngstown, and Youngstown's transit system runs bus routes to both. (Youngstown itself is not recommended because of its commonly high unemployment and stagnant economy.) Boardman is considered pleasant and peaceful. It is a local retail center and close to the tourist attraction of Mill Creek Park. Austintown is pretty white and the economy seems limited; probably many people commute. Most residents of both communities seem satisfied.
- Alliance (close to 22,000 people) is west of Youngstown. Most employment is low-paid retail, but the cost of living is low. It's been called a college town, but really doesn't qualify; it is home only to a very small private college and a community college satellite campus. It is the home of the Cat Fanciers' Association and its museum, and holds an annual Carnation

Festival. Alliance is served by the regional transit system and an Amtrak line.

- Chillicothe in the south (22,000 people) is a historic town with rich Native American history and a park with many Hopewell mounds. There's an Amish community in the area. The African-American population is small but dates back to pre-Civil War days, when there was a free Black community at this stop on the Underground Railroad. Employers include a paper mill, a prison, health care, and plenty of low-paid retail. There's a small state college, a technical school for high school students, and an audio engineering school in the area. Residents enjoy the friendly atmosphere, attractive downtown with a historic theater, parks and hiking, and events like the county fair, storytelling festival, and Feast of the Flowering Moon (which celebrates Native American heritage).

Pennsylvania

The population of the broader Philadelphia metro area in southeastern Pennsylvania is over 6 million people, close to half of the state's population, and that of the Pittsburgh metro area in the west is well over 2 million. Though not on the coast (being up the Delaware River a ways from Delaware Bay), Philadelphia is as much part of the east coast megalopolis as New Jersey to the east, and as such, is likely to be unsustainable. Kurtz et al. (2020) estimate that most urban parts of Pennsylvania would require moderately large foodsheds, over 250 or even 500 km radius, to be supplied even if they adopted a low-meat diet. These include not only the big metros but pretty much the whole eastern end of the state (Allentown, Wilkes-Barre, Scranton), as well as Erie in the northwest, and the central counties including the really quite small communities of State College and Williamsport.

Kurtz et al.'s analyses might be pessimistic because they do rely on current land use and production figures, and agricultural productivity in Pennsylvania has certainly not been maximized. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania (2014) reported that between 2007 and 2012, most counties had decreases, sometimes of 20% or more,

in the number of farms and acres farmed. In an era of temporarily high farm productivity and low commodity prices, many farmers who could have produced valuable food get forced out of the business for economic reasons—another sad failure of the great god Market. If importation of food became difficult, though some of the farmland that's been lost will have gone under pavement or been ruined by fracking, many of those farms could be restored. I therefore do think that residence in the smaller metro areas of this state is a reasonable choice.

Contrarily, it should be noted that most of Pennsylvania lies in a major fossil fuel extraction province, with drinking water in some places already poisoned by fracking chemicals, and the fossil fuel industry may well *gain* political power as production declines. Some rural areas are therefore unsustainable environments for healthy human life. There is also a distinctive regional culture, accent, and language that make outsiders rather obvious, so that many small towns might not be a great destination for people from California, say.

Migration within Pennsylvania, as people depart the Philadelphia metro area for literally greener pastures, is certainly to be encouraged. Like several key swing states, Pennsylvania has been gerrymandered to reduce the legislative representation of urban and non-white communities, and after the 2020 election, some GOP politicians suggested discarding all ballots from the most African-American counties to throw the election to Trump. Outside the metro areas, the large majority of the state is mostly Republican. I argue again that this should not keep urbanites from moving to smaller communities. When everyone of your race, party, or educational background is packed into one place, people from other groups more easily demonize you, *and* it becomes feasible for them to scheme to discard your ballots even after you manage to cast them, which cannot be done if you are living in the same precinct. So do not worry so much about who your state legislator will be when you move, only about whether you can survive and thrive at your destination.

If we avoid the two mega-urban conglomerations mentioned above, modest-sized cities with potential include:

- Harrisburg, on the Susquehanna River in southeast-central Pennsylvania, has about 50,000 people. It is the largest city in the Harrisburg-Carlisle metro area, which has over half a million people spread over three counties in hundreds of small segregate municipalities. (One of the satellite communities is Hershey, well-known for its chocolate company.) Harrisburg is the state capital, and state government is the largest regional employer, with the federal government and military second. Services, healthcare, insurance, biotech, entertainment, distribution, education, and manufacturing are all components of a well-diversified regional economy. The town has had serious financial problems but seems to be bouncing back. Harrisburg is home to the Pennsylvania Farm Show, the Great American Outdoor Show, Motorama, and many other events; cultural activities are plentiful. There is an Amtrak stop.
- Erie, on the northwestern border, has a population of about 95,000 in a county of about 250,000. The population of the city and county have been declining. Unemployment is always above the state average. Though poverty is high and wages often low, crime is little above the national average, and houses are affordable. There are still some jobs in manufacturing (notably, plastics), as well as technology, health care, tourism, insurance, and the usual service industries. The region is a major wine producer. Location on Lake Erie, mostly well above sea level but with an active port and waterfront formerly used for shipbuilding, should position Erie well for the long-term future—especially if a Northeastern segregate nation had to rely upon Great Lakes shipping and transit to connect portions of its territory. There is cultural diversity thanks to refugee communities; religious diversity includes an Old Ritualist Russian Orthodox church. There are several institutions of higher education, but no community college, though they may be trying to rectify that. Lake-effect snowfall in the climate

change era averages *100* inches per year; you'll want good snow boots. There's an Amtrak stop, and bus service to major cities in surrounding states.

- Scranton, in northeastern Pennsylvania, has 76,000 people in an overall metro region of over half a million. It's known as a hardscrabble former coal town, like several others in the region, underlaid with abandoned mines. Revitalization efforts have sought to attract tourists and prettied up the downtown, but it's still financially strapped and blue-collar; party affiliation is now about 50/50. Current industries include manufacturing and health care. Local colleges include a community college branch campus. There is currently no passenger train service, but efforts to restore it are underway.
- Wilkes-Barre, near Scranton, has 44,000 people. Like Scranton, it's blue-collar (both economically and politically) and has had problems with unemployment, especially during the pandemic, low wages, and poverty. Housing, though, is cheap. Local industries include health care, banking, and insurance. It's located on the Susquehanna River, which in the past has inflicted catastrophic flooding after tropical storms. So far levees have protected the town from repeats, though it seems partially by forcing the water into smaller communities that get wiped out instead; be careful where you live in this metro area. There's a nice riverfront park system and a community college.
- Altoona is a city of 44,000 in southern Pennsylvania somewhat west of center. Historically a railroad town, its economy now depends more upon health care, corporate headquarters, and retail and service. There is a small Penn State University campus and a technical school. Outdoor recreation, trainwatching at Horseshoe Curve, and visiting the multiple local amusement parks are among the activities that attract tourists. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Lancaster is a historic city of 58,000 with a broader metro area of half a million. It is farther southeast than Harrisburg, creeping closer to Philadelphia than many might want to be. Health care, tourism, manufacturing, and retail are important to

the economy, which still faces challenges; poverty is high. The city has a community college and several small colleges, mostly religious; in addition to the typical cultural institutions, there is a long-running Bible musical theater. Lancaster has a substantial Hispanic population, mostly of Puerto Rican descent, and holds an annual Puerto Rican festival. A large regional concentration of Amish farmers attracts tourists and antiquers and supplies agricultural products to local farmers' markets. Those include the nation's oldest continuously operating farmers' market (since 1730; now operating three days a week). Be advised that Lancaster was an early adopter of widespread public surveillance. There's an Amtrak stop.

- York (44,000 people) is south of Harrisburg, to which it has a commuter bus route. The town has Revolutionary War-era historic significance; it has four historic districts and many lovely buildings from the 1700s and 1800s. The region has a fairly good range of manufacturing and food processing industries, and a few small colleges and business schools. Retail and government services are other major employments. The York Fair is the oldest state fair in the U.S., dating to 1765.
- State College (about 42,000 full-time residents) in central Pennsylvania is nominal home to Pennsylvania State University (over 40,000 students), though not all the campus is within its borders. Penn State is a major research university, known as a "public Ivy" for its superior quality. The university dominates the town's character and is by far its largest employer. The town is densely populated and has many dreary high-rise buildings. Median rent is well above average, and home prices, though not NYC-stratospheric, are high enough that a tenure-track salary would be needed to get a mortgage for most houses. State College is relatively walkable and is home to a philatelic research library and a large arts festival.
- Williamsport, in north-central Pennsylvania, has less than 30,000 people but is the largest town in its metro region. It is located in a well-endowed portion of the Marcellus Shale petroleum province so there is fracking and extraction

> employment in the area. One might hope that the town is big/white enough that the fracking companies won't dare to poison its water supply too severely. Local parks still have beautiful waterfalls and trails. Manufacturing (with several important companies), healthcare, education (including small colleges), and state government are other major economic sectors. Little League was founded and is still headquartered here, with the Little League World Series held in South Williamsport.

As elsewhere in the Rust Belt, the small cities and towns in rural Pennsylvania are often economically disadvantaged, and employment opportunities for outsiders may be limited. For small cities or towns, I would look first at those for which City-data records no significant employment in the mining and fossil fuel extraction industry. (Find these data under "Most common male industries - mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction.") Obviously, if you're a petroleum geologist you'd be looking for places with lots of extractive employment. For other folks, I consider this because the fracking industry is powerful, and if it is a major source of well-paying local jobs, you won't be able to complain publicly about carcinogens in your drinking water without receiving hostility or worse. However, some small towns with modest levels of extraction-industry employment are worth considering.

Most of the small towns without extraction employment are clustered in the southeast or near Pittsburgh, but some are scattered throughout the state. A few of those are effectively suburbs of moderately sized cities, such as Erie and York. The following examples seem relatively stable. To be clear, all receive some complaints about limited jobs, prejudiced residents, drugs and/or crime. The Rust Belt has not been doing well in recent decades. However, there are also happy residents who think well of the places—though Berwick perhaps the least so.

- Berwick (10,000 people) is an eastern town. It has maintained manufacturing employment, including a local potato chip

company; there is also retail employment, and the town is headquarters of the Penske Truck Leasing Co. There is a small community college. The downtown Christmas displays have long been a local tourist draw. Residents report that jobs are limited and drugs a growing problem.

- Carlisle (19,000 people) is in the south near Harrisburg. There is an Apple repair facility, but other major employers (an Amazon warehouse, a call center) offer less desirable jobs. One of Penn State's law schools is located in Carlisle. Carlisle is at a major highway juncture and is known for its numerous car shows.
- Chambersburg in the central far south has about 21,000 people, with 52,000 in the broader area. It borders Caledonia State Park and the large Michaux State Forest. The economy includes manufacturing, retail, food processing, social services, the military, and agriculture. There are many small farms, often Amish or Mennonite, in the county. A tiny liberal arts college hosts the Cumberland Valley School of Music, and there is a vo-tech school. This is a conservative town that has problems with poverty and limited jobs.
- Greensburg, a town of 14,000 in the southwest, is technically part of the Pittsburgh metro area but is 30 miles from the city proper and is considered the local shopping center by surrounding communities. Retail and services are primary economic sectors; outside city limits there is more manufacturing, as well as two large prisons, and a couple of corporate headquarters. Good jobs may be limited, though. There are several small college campuses in the area, and various cultural amenities. There is a regional transit system and an Amtrak stop.
- Waynesboro at the southern border is a town of over 10,000 people near Chambersburg. It is also near Camp David and the Pentagon's doomsday Raven Rock Mountain Complex, which won't do the residents any good. Countywide, major sources of employment are government, health care, and retail. There is

some tourism, both for Civil War historic sites and scenery. Jobs may be limited, but most residents like the place.

Since we won't all be able to afford to be too picky, here are some of the more promising communities that do have extraction employment:

- Ephrata is in the southeastern part of the state, northeast of Lancaster; like that small city, it's between Harrisburg and Philadelphia, and closer to the latter than one might want. Housing costs are about equal to the national average, that is, pretty expensive. It's a former resort town of close to 14,000 people with low crime but perhaps noticeable policing. There is a relatively good range of small businesses, though nothing that really stands out.
- Bloomsburg (ca. 13,000 people) is in east-central Pennsylvania, north of Harrisburg. It's a college town, and Bloomsburg University is the town's largest employer, with other jobs in services, retail, manufacturing, health care, and state government. It's a very pleasant and friendly town in the eyes of most residents (though non-white residents report somewhat different experiences), and boasts the largest annual agricultural fair in the state.
- Sunbury (9000 people) is another quiet, not exactly diverse small town. It is the headquarters of the Weis grocery store chain; another local employer is Great Coasters International, which designs and manufactures wooden roller coasters. Some residents grouse about crime, but by national standards it's really not bad. There's a very small branch community college.
- Hollidaysburg, South Williamsport, Lock Haven, and Bellefonte are in the central portion of the state. Hollidaysburg, at about 5600 people, doesn't have much excitement, but residents are happy with its friendly, peaceful character, historic buildings, parks and outdoor recreation, and relative ease of travel to big cities. Local industry includes a railroad car shop and reclamation plant. Like the vast majority of small

blue-collar towns, it's heavily Red (and 98% white) and liberals should be close-mouthed.

- South Williamsport, unsurprisingly, is next to Williamsport. As noted above, this town of 6000 hosts the annual Little League World Series and the Little League Museum. There's some local industry, but most residents who are not in retail-type jobs probably work in Williamsport. It's peaceful and pleasant, but almost 99% white and conservative prejudices are common. (You may as well assume that to be true of all small towns in the state unless otherwise specified.) The town is on the West Branch Susquehanna River and its levees are not in great shape.
- Lock Haven (8000 people) is on the Susquehanna, which has a city beach, and its levees seem to be holding up. There is a little ethnic diversity (only 93% white!) and some economic diversity, with jobs in retail and services, education, health care, and manufacturing. However, jobs are still limited. The largest employer is Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, which provides some arts and cultural events. There is a Piper aircraft museum and annual airfest. Residents are generally happy, except for those who are bored.
- Bellefonte (6000 people) is next to State College, the main university town, and a bedroom community for many commuters to university jobs. Therefore, incomes are higher than in most small towns in the state, and housing costs significantly higher. Happily, there is a bus service linking the two communities. Government is another major employer; there are three prisons in the vicinity. Bellefonte is seen as a friendly and pleasant community, with a historic district, spring water supply, very nice park, and local distillery among the attractions.
- Dunmore (ca. 14,000 people) is part of the Scranton metro region. Average incomes, and costs of living, are therefore a bit higher. Sadly, there is no bus service linking the two. There is local manufacturing employment at an industrial park and a chocolate company (not *that* one; Gertrude Hawk Chocolates), and a Penn State branch campus.

- St. Marys (no apostrophe) in the northwest has about 12,000 people but a lot of land area. Hunting, including elk hunting, and fishing are popular. It is the home of the Straub brewery and a powder metal plant. Jobs are limited, and some complain about the police.
- Franklin, also in the northwest, is a generally friendly and pleasant historic town of 6000. Employers include local steel and electronics manufacturers. The town is best known for the large annual Applefest craft festival.
- Indiana (13,000 people) is southwestern, near Pittsburgh but outside the dense metro area. The largest employer is Indiana University of Pennsylvania, a state school that has had severe enrollment declines and sacked a lot of tenured faculty in 2020. As a college town it's more liberal than most on this list, and actually 8% non-white; there may be some town-gown tension due to carousing students. Other notable economic sectors are natural gas drilling, banking and finance, insurance, and Christmas tree farming. Cost of living has remained affordable, and residents happy with its peaceful, pleasant atmosphere.

Pennsylvania has limited Amtrak service compared to some eastern states of similar size and population. The one line going completely through the state from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia includes Greensburg, Altoona, Harrisburg, and Lancaster among its stops, along with several smaller communities. In the northwest, Erie is the only in-state stop on a line between Chicago and Buffalo. Pennsylvania has a network of intercity bus transit and county shared-ride services. Useful information on them is difficult to access. However, Greyhound currently lists 80 stops within Pennsylvania, which in itself makes service far better than in many other states (though some of the more rural towns listed here appear to have no intercity transport).

Vermont

Vermont has a reputation for liberalism because its people are generally tolerant and value their environment. However, it's worth

remembering that they were for a long time the only state to allow permitless concealed carry firearms, which was called "Vermont carry" back before many states chose to extend the privilege to any white guy with an assault rifle. Vermont's state motto is "Freedom and Unity" (they also have a dopey Latin motto), and the state still has much of the old New England Yankee culture, which is hard-working, self-reliant, understated, and modest. New Englanders tend to believe in helping their neighbors, if they are deserving, and otherwise keeping their noses out of other people's business. Vermont is usually a nice state, though it's not very diverse and African-American residents find some towns less pleasant.

Vermont is also a mostly rural state (the neighboring New Hampshire is of similar geographic size but far more populous) with a large dairy industry. There is a strong environmental and sustainability movement, and organic farming is popular. The largest city is the northern Burlington (about 42,000 people, but with a much larger metro area), on the shore of Lake Champlain. Several years ago, it became the first U.S. city to transition to 100% renewable energy. There are only eight other towns between 10,000 and 22,000 people. The largest, Essex, is in the south, and South Burlington, Rutland, and Colchester are part of the Burlington metro area. There are close to twenty towns between 5000 and 10,000 people, including the dinky capital of Montpelier, scattered throughout the state. An Amtrak line running north-south offers a surprising number of stops in Vermont.

Kurtz et al. (2020) consider the metropolitan area of Burlington to have a food sourcing problem despite its interest in sustainability. Given the need to feed other cities in the region, Burlington would need to draw from a foodshed of over 1000 km radius. With a low-meat diet, this could be reduced to the 500–1000 km range, but still, when you compare that to Vermont's physical size, the clear message is that Vermont's agricultural productivity would not feed the Vermonters who are already there, and probably could not be made to do so even by a great increase in agricultural labor. There would be plenty of dairy products, but poor soil and short growing seasons would restrict crop production both here and in bordering states. For

this reason, I would recommend that the region should not seek to grow further.

However, Vermont thinks it needs more people. The state has been declining in population for several years (Henderson 2021). Its economy is already quite small and shrinking; young people have left for bigger cities, and the pandemic has induced a lasting labor shortage. Their recent unemployment rate is 3%, and employers are so desperate for workers that the state has set up a program to reimburse relocation expenses for workers who move from other states (D'Ambrosio 2021). The current program offers up to $7500 in reimbursement to workers in 50 qualifying occupational categories, and in 2022 there will be a program for remote workers who maintain out-of-state employers. The state has an excellent website (https://thinkvermont.com/relocate/) explaining the requirements and providing thousands of job listings, talking about real estate, showing videos of local scenery, and inviting those considering moving to "connect with a Vermonter." Nobody can say they're not working hard to attract young blood.

One downside is that you must relocate first and get reimbursed later—but if you were sure of your eligibility and had credit cards, you could put some of the costs of moving on plastic. Another is that almost all of the jobs targeted are service jobs or unskilled or semi-skilled labor, so most would be poorly paid. For you to be eligible, the employer must pay at least $13.39 per hour, but Vermont has expensive housing, and in many towns you'd have a tough time paying rent with that "livable wage." Check out current local rents before you apply remotely for a job in Vermont. Despite all these warnings, if you're working-class and living in a place where it's hard to find an employer who will treat you as a human being, you might understandably be tempted by the fact that this state might roll out a red carpet for you.

Wisconsin

Day and Hall (2016) think the southeastern quadrant of this state, extending along the western shore of Lake Michigan up to Green Bay, is all unsustainable because of its urbanization. I strongly

disagree, with the caveat that living in the overly large, politically targeted city of Milwaukee should be avoided. Green Bay, for example, is evaluated by Kurtz et al. (2020) as being easily fed from nearby farmland if a less meat-heavy diet were adopted. It has little over 100,000 people, with low unemployment, crime, and cost of living; it has a port on Lake Michigan's Green Bay but is largely well above sea level, though some areas have flood risks. This is a place that could be ideally situated for sustainable urban life.

Wisconsin is subject to a heavy GOP gerrymander and escalating vote-suppression measures. Milwaukee, as the most urban and least white part of the state, is most targeted, not just by gerrymandering but by a recent law that will punish the city for daring to trim its police budget. Outside the metro area, Wausau is among places where district lines have been conspicuously drawn to deny city-dwellers representation in the legislature. However, the more such smaller cities and towns thrive, assuming that honest censuses are allowed to take place in future, the harder it will become to disenfranchise their residents in the long term. The more Milwaukee-area residents get out of the big city and disperse themselves, at least up to a point, the more chance they will have of having a political voice in future.

Recent reports are that water in certain communities is contaminated by disease-causing PFAS or "forever chemicals," which in truth is also the case in many other U.S. states, some of which may not even have bothered to do testing to find the problem. In Wisconsin, the Republican minority-ruled legislature has blocked any meaningful efforts to address the problem or to prevent it from worsening (Perkins 2021). A short-term view might say "don't live in a place where the legislature might make your kids drink toxins," but that's actually most of the country now. If, when the threatened civil war begins, we don't have one geographically cohesive, potentially self-supporting region of states having an enfranchised majority that *wants* a livable environment, all of the United States will end up under similar rule and there will be noplace for anyone to escape to.

Wisconsin has several good-sized cities that could be very suitable for those who prefer more urban destinations, including the following:

- Green Bay. In addition to the virtues noted above, there are the *Green Bay Packers!* Almost every medium-sized Northeastern city has some kind of local sports team(s), but the presence of an excellent locally-owned NFL team must be a big plus for sports fans. Economic sectors include papermaking and other manufacturing, meatpacking, healthcare, insurance, and logistics. There is a modest state university and several small colleges, including a technical college and a Menominee tribal college. The city has a botanical garden and an urban wildlife refuge, among other cultural amenities, and a bus system that offers little or no service to large outlying regions.
- Appleton (75,000 people) is south of Green Bay. Appleton is a regional center for health care; the economy also includes finance and insurance, manufacturing, and distribution. There is a private college, a large technical college, and a few branch campuses. Appleton was a sundown town until 1970; diversity has improved, but most non-white citizens are Hispanic or Asian. It's a nice town, especially if you are white, but expect it to be a bit conservative. There are many public events and performing arts. Appleton is the center of a regional Fox Valley transit system that connects to several smaller neighboring cities. The Fox Valley metro area is growing and prospering, and offers many opportunities.
- Oshkosh (67,000 people) is on Lake Winnebago south of the Appleton metro area. The economy includes manufacturing (plastics, military trucks), food processing (two chocolate companies), tourism (the draws including water sports, such as fishing tournaments, and multiple music festivals), health care, and corrections (there is a large prison). The University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh is a large employer, and there is a community college branch. Oshkosh is not very diverse, and is viewed as less classy than Appleton; however, most residents

who comment on it seem pretty satisfied. The bus system has a route connecting Oshkosh to Neenah, from which transit to Appleton is available.

- Madison, a city of over 260,000, is the state capital, but also houses the University of Wisconsin's main campus, and is politically targeted for its confirmed liberalism and cultural diversity. High-tech, biotech, IT, education, advertising, insurance, government, and healthcare are major employments. It is a great town for eating, drinking, music, nightlife, and winter sports, and is the home of the Madison Scouts Drum and Bugle Corps. There are many consumer, worker, and housing co-ops. Virtually any world religion has at least one local institution. Madison strives to support bicycling and has a good bus system. Housing costs are far higher than in other Wisconsin cities; you don't want to move here unless you have independent means or a good job offer in hand. Lakes and streams in the area have dangerous PFAS loads, so don't fish, but the tap water is safe.
- Janesville, about 65,000 people, is southeast of Madison, close enough to visit regularly, and much more affordable. Health care, education, manufacturing, and communications are major employers. There is a community college, and Janesville is the home of the Wisconsin School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. It has a botanical garden, a greenbelt, and numerous parks.
- Beloit, near Janesville on the Illinois border, has about 37,000 people but a relatively urban vibe, with moderate diversity, and many urban amenities. The economy includes varied manufacturing and corporate headquarters. There is a technical college. The downtown is known for its charm.
- Wausau in north-central Wisconsin is a city of almost 40,000 that has a thriving economy based on manufacturing (especially of paper), insurance and banking, tourism, and other services. It is a center of ginseng cultivation. Wausau has a two-year university, a technical college, and some satellite campuses. Local sports include skiing, curling, and kayaking. Over 10%

of the town is of Hmong ethnicity, Vietnam War refugees and their descendants, so there is an unusual number of Asian restaurant and grocery businesses.

- Stevens Point (26,000 people) in central Wisconsin has a state university and a technical college. Industries include papermaking and other manufacturing, insurance, and software; there are several corporate headquarters. Outdoor recreation opportunities are plentiful. There is a modest local bus system. Housing costs are increasing, but still reasonable, and affordable given average local incomes.
- Eau Claire in the west, at the fringe of the Driftless Area (see above under Iowa, and below), has almost 70,000 people. It bills itself as the horseradish capital of the world. Manufacturing, agriculture, retail, and health care are important economic sectors. There is a state university branch, a technical college, and a Montessori school. Eau Claire is not very diverse, but does have a noticeable Hmong minority. Several downtown and riverfront neighborhoods have been or are being redeveloped; there's a hint that this may involve shoving out poorer residents. A strong economy, low costs of living, and many public and recreational activities make Eau Claire a pleasant, livable city. It is among the communities affected by PFAS pollution, but tapwater is allegedly safe to drink.
- La Crosse in the southwest is a Mississippi River port city with over 50,000 people. It is the largest city within Wisconsin's part of the Driftless Area, a scenic, artsy, pleasant, mostly rural region. There are three colleges with 20,000 students between them, and education is a major business, as are health care, manufacturing, retail, and brewing. La Crosse has dozens of arts organizations, and is home to the Blue Stars Drum and Bugle Corps and a NASCAR asphalt track speedway. Outdoor sports are popular. It was once a "sundown town"; it has apologized for that history and now has a little racial and religious diversity, but is still pretty white. Like Eau Claire, its tap water is supposedly okay despite local PFAS pollution. Has an Amtrak stop.

- Sheboygan (48,000 people) is on the shore of Lake Michigan, north of the Milwaukee metro area. The economy includes manufacturing, food processing, health care, and tourism; the area is known for surfing and bratwurst. The town is peaceful and pleasant, though somewhat conservative. There are Hmong and Latino minorities. Developers have been building fancy apartments and jacking up rents, but cost of living can still be affordable. There are public college and community college branch campuses.
- Fond du Lac (45,000 people) is west of Sheboygan. It's a historic town on Lake Winnebago with four historic neighborhoods. The economy includes a variety of manufacturing and information-economy corporations. Outdoor recreation, such as walleye fishing, is popular, as is the county fair. Some consider it boring, but another word for boring could be "peaceful."

There are a few dozen small cities in Wisconsin. The downstate areas are perhaps more welcoming and have less extreme weather. The southwest encompasses Wisconsin's part of the Driftless Area, mentioned above under Iowa, which also extends into corners of Illinois and Minnesota. "The Driftless" has a pleasant, close-knit rural culture and lovely scenery, and would be a great destination for people who enjoy rural life and the outdoors. Promising small cities and towns in or bordering the Driftless Area include:

- Menomonie (16,000 people) is on Lake Menomin at the northern edge of the Driftless, near Eau Claire. It hosts the University of Wisconsin–Stout, the state's polytechnic university, and a technical college branch campus. The former is large enough to make students a good share of the population, and many businesses cater to them. Other major economic sectors are health care (including assisted living and nursing facilities), manufacturing, and distribution or logistics. Cost of living is low.

- Chippewa Falls (14,000 people), a bit north of Eau Claire, is similarly at the northernmost fringe of the Driftless. It is the home of corporations including Leinenkugel Brewing and hosts the Northern Wisconsin State Fair. Manufacturing, retail and online retail, health care, and county government provide many jobs.
- Onalaska (19,000 people) is a suburb of La Crosse located above the Black River and alongside a large manmade lake. Jobs include professional services, transport and distribution, retail, and hospitality. Housing is costlier than in some places; it's probably a bedroom community for many workers in La Crosse. Higher education is available in La Crosse. Onalaska bills itself as the sunfish capital of the world.
- Platteville (12,000 people) is in the southwest corner of the state. It is now a college town hosting a University of Wisconsin regional school, whose engineering program has attracted engineering businesses. Historically it was a center of lead ore mining, and an unknown amount of land in this and neighboring counties may be significantly contaminated (Tenenbaum 2019). The town has also had hundreds of lead water service lines but is now offering grants to encourage their replacement.
- Sparta (less than 10,000 people) is east of La Crosse at the edge of the Driftless. It is the site of close to a dozen corporate headquarters, primarily small manufacturers. There are several senior independent and assisted living facilities. Sparta is at the intersection of two of the state's major bicycle trails, and bills itself as the bicycling capital of the world. Local artesian waters were once reputed to have healing effects. Sparta has an annual four-day carnival known as Butterfest. The county's agricultural economy also includes major cranberry producers as well as beef, grain, fruits and vegetables.
- Prairie du Chien, between the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers, has less than 6000 people. It is cheap and peaceful, and as one of the oldest towns in the state, has many historic places. Tourism is important to the economy; jobs include retail,

service, manufacturing, distribution, and government (including corrections). Hunting and fishing are popular recreations. According to City-data, the town has less than 5% African-American residents and 100% of them live in poverty. I'd wonder about that if I were Black.

- Viroqua, southeast of La Crosse, hardly *has* any non-white people. But it does, despite having barely over 4000 residents, have a large used book and music store, an organic food co-op, and regular square dancing events. The historic downtown makes active efforts to keep and develop independent small businesses following the arrival of a Mall-Wart. Viroqua is the nominal home of the decentralized, delightful Driftless Folk School. Residents say that housing costs are increasing due to the arrival of monied outsiders, so migrants should remain few in number and modest in spending habits to avoid provoking resentment.

The remainder of Wisconsin has many small towns that might be fine for people (especially fairer-skinned people—virtually none have much diversity) who like small-town life and can find work there. For lifelong urbanites, I would recommend first moving to a bigger city and spending a few years becoming a Wisconsinite before you try to become a rural Wisconsinite. Here are a few examples of potentially appealing smaller towns and suburbs:

- Weston (15,000 people) is in the north-central part of the state, near Wausau. It's a bit pricier than most small towns, though not above average nationally. There is a small Hmong population. The town is quiet and pleasant. It has created multiple business and technology "parks" and is making active efforts to attract more corporate employers.
- Marshfield (19,000 people) is southwest of Wausau. It's affordable, peaceful, and well liked by residents. It's a regional medical center, and health care is a major component of the economy; there is also employment in industry and transport,

and public college and community college branch campuses. There's an attractive downtown with historic buildings.

- Neenah (29,000 people) is located in the Fox Valley metro region between Appleton and Oshkosh, with single transit routes connecting it to both. Its economy includes manufacturing (multiple paper companies, also steel) and some corporate headquarters; unemployment has been low of late. Neenah is pretty white, but doesn't attract the kind of complaints about police harassment of minority residents that are common for other cities in that demographic. Residents describe it as family-friendly, peaceful, and beautiful, with a historic downtown, riverside parks, and appealing and diverse public art. Cultural options are pretty good for a town of this size, with a variety of small arts institutions, public sports facilities, and live music venues.
- Menasha, Kaukauna, and Grand Chute are among the smaller towns in the Appleton metro area; the Fox Valley transit service has routes connecting each of them to Appleton. Menasha (18,000 people) is the home of a University of Wisconsin branch campus, mostly two-year for transfer students, which has public facilities including a planetarium and museum. Kaukauna (16,000 people) has manufacturing businesses including a paper mill that affects air quality. (That's the smell of *money*....) Grand Chute (24,000 people) is a little pricier, and hosts the headquarters of the ultraconservative John Birch Society. Despite its size, it is only a *town*, having been denied incorporation as a *village* (which, in Wisconsin, is peculiarly considered a higher status).
- Ashwaubenon (17,000 people), Bellevue (16,000), and De Pere (25,000) are in the Green Bay metro area. Although they aren't the most expensive Green Bay suburbs, they certainly aren't as cheap as towns farther away. Residents report all three to be pleasant and friendly, if a little dull. Ashwaubenon hosts Green Bay Packers training facilities; De Pere has a school for children with developmental disabilities. Many residents probably commute to Green Bay for work.

- South-central Baraboo (over 12,000 people) was the home of the Ringling Brothers and still houses the Circus World Museum, a large multibuilding historic attraction and research facility, which in normal times has live circus performances during the tourist season. There is a university branch campus and a downtown historic district. It's apparently a bit insular.
- Whitewater and Watertown are southeastern but outside the Milwaukee metro area. Whitewater (ca. 15,000 people) is a college town; the local University of Wisconsin branch is the largest employer. It's a pleasant example of the genre, with nothing terribly remarkable (aside from the ghost of a famous witch) and not much excitement. A state forest is on the doorstep and outdoor activities are readily available.
- Watertown (23,000 people) is a former railroad town that still has a fair amount of employment in distribution, along with health care, manufacturing, and food processing. It's not wealthy, but unemployment at the moment is reasonably low. Retail and services are limited, and drugs have been a problem, but crime is not high and most residents find it pleasant. There's a community college branch campus.
- Monroe at the south end of the state has over 10,000 people. Local industry includes cheese manufacturing and sales, and there is an annual cheese festival. Household income is higher than in many rural towns, but housing is still affordable. Locals love the friendly, peaceful, pleasant atmosphere.
- Lake Geneva (8000 people) is a resort town in the southeast, near both Milwaukee and Chicago but outside their metro areas. The economy relies heavily on tourism, and in summer the town is very busy, but it retains a small-town atmosphere. There's a beautiful historic district. Housing is more expensive than in most small Wisconsin towns, but not exorbitant; however, low wages make some residents feel squeezed. New residents report feeling welcome.
- Superior is in the northeastern corner of the state, on a bay of Lake Superior opposite Duluth, Minnesota. The *city* of Superior (over 26,000 people) may be confused both with the *village* of

Superior and with the *town* of Superior (things like this seem to happen in Wisconsin unusually often; try to find it charming). Both Superior and Duluth have busy port facilities; transportation, manufacturing, and the local shipyard are important to the economy. There is some tourism. Superior has a small public college and a community college. Duluth's public transit service connects to Superior, which is a quieter and cheaper place to live.

- Rhinelander in the north (7500 people), despite its horrifying winter weather, would appeal to very rugged outdoorspeople for the close proximity of the Nicolet National Forest. It has a paper mill and other manufacturers (including defense corporations) that offer employment, as well as tourism; a Farm and Fleet store will be opening soon. It is the home of the Hodag Country Festival. Unlike many small towns, Rhinelander seeks to recruit new residents and makes much information readily accessible on its website. However, some residents complain that it's a bit run down, schools are not great, and jobs and connections to the outside world are limited.
- Sturgeon Bay (9000 people) is the county seat of Door County, the majority of the narrow northeastern peninsula defining Green Bay, which at present does huge tourism business. It has a charming historic downtown and a branch campus of a technical college. Manufacturing and catering to tourists are major employments, and many businesses shut down in the winter when the tourist season ends. Many residents are retirees from elsewhere, but housing remains reasonably priced.

Several bus companies do a pretty good job of connecting most good-sized Wisconsin towns with transport hubs and/or communities in Minnesota and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Unfortunately, there is little service in small communities, and those that are served are mostly central, northern, or eastern, largely avoiding the lovely Driftless Area.

The Fox Valley metro area is already actively growing and seems to offer a particularly broad range of opportunities. However, aside

from the very densely populated and politically oppressed area around Milwaukee, I'd argue that virtually anyplace in this state where you think you could get a job and fit in well enough would be a good bet. The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) reports that the majority of Wisconsin's counties have gained population in the past decade, not only the counties surrounding big urban areas, as in most states. Wisconsin, with its abundant water and farmland, productive agriculture, and many river and lake ports, should be very well positioned for the future, and it seems that its people share that sense of optimism.

Chapter 8: I Wanna Go Back to Dixie

If you have concluded that you'd be most comfortable in the Southeast, for whatever reason, there are lots of places you could live. Firstly, avoid any low-lying areas near the Gulf or Atlantic Coasts. These areas will get hit over and over by increasingly strong hurricanes, flooding, and pollution spread by the flooding, and rebuilding will become less affordable as time goes by.

I strongly recommend avoiding Florida altogether, or leaving altogether if you live there. First, its population is already awfully large. Second, the situation of people in low-lying coastal areas will become increasingly difficult, and they may start deciding to migrate north and/or inland so they can sell their property before it loses most of its value. That would put increasing pressure on property values and rents in northern Florida. Much of the state's total land area is quite low-lying, and the current administration for culture-war reasons might not only refuse to acknowledge climate change but actively try to prevent cities from engaging in mitigation efforts. People should be leaving Florida, not moving in.

Louisiana is also a questionable destination choice. Human activities, as noted previously, are already wrecking the southern coastal region. Southern Louisiana is home to a distinctive regional culture and forced climate migration would be particularly traumatic for many lifelong residents if they were forced to move into a very different cultural milieu. Northern Louisiana is culturally distinct from the southern part of the state, but at least it's close by and the southern culture isn't totally unfamiliar there, making it a more tolerable choice for many than moving out of state. Most of the available space in northern Louisiana ought to be left for those whose homes in southern Louisiana are being destroyed.

I also suggest avoiding Texas, though I do make some recommendations for conservatives who insist on moving there or residents who might wish to migrate within the state. The western half will be hit badly by the expected megadrought, so inmigration is certainly to be avoided. The eastern half has several oversized urban populations, and the Gulf Coast area is very vulnerable to hurricanes. Texas' independent electrical grid, designed to permit money to be funneled to multimillionaires rather than maintenance and upgrades, is in worse shape than that of any other part of the country. Service has already been lethally unreliable during climate change-influenced extreme weather and may well continue to worsen.

If you are moving to the Southeast because you want to live under very conservative government, avoid Virginia and North Carolina (see Chapter 9), and possibly even Georgia, where you might someday find that the population has changed enough to make the governance substantially different than you had expected. I discuss Georgia in this chapter because of its geographic and historical associations, but note the caveats. Georgia also has few very promising localities outside the overbuilt cities, and Kurtz et al. (2020) report that the cities would require rather large foodsheds even on a low-meat diet. I therefore recommend that most migrants do not consider moving to these borderland or atypical Southern states, though residents may wish to move within them in order to get out of large urban areas.

Several states have metropolitan areas that require large foodsheds according to the analysis of Kurtz et al. (2020), either because they are in montane areas with limited agricultural productivity or because they are of unduly large size already. Rural areas in other parts of those states might be fine, but the oversized urban areas should be avoided. Southern states that appear to be best positioned in this specific sense include Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, western Tennessee, and the eastern part of the Carolinas, as well as Louisiana and east Texas, which, as noted, have future problems that won't have affected an analysis based on current conditions. Unfortunately, some of the more "sustainable" states have avoided over-urbanization by having such economic and social difficulties

that many people who migrate from the countryside prefer to leave the state altogether.

I presume that most migrants to this region will wish to avoid big cities. That leaves huge amounts of real estate in the wet parts of the South to consider. Poverty and crime are often relatively high in smaller Southern communities; violence and drugs are particular problems in the chronically depressed Appalachian region. Public transportation in most Southern states is limited at best. Many small towns are unwelcoming to strangers, especially ones who are perceived as Yankees, so moving to a bigger town or small city, at least initially, is a much safer strategy, especially if you do not have a job in hand before you move.

Some states clearly have more problems than others, and might rationally be considered less desirable. However, I presume that you are familiar with the political culture of the region, so refrain from repeatedly noting where health care and education are lousy because the state government thinks funding them would be Socialism. If you have family members who might *need* a social safety net of some kind to survive, though, do keep in mind that Republican evangelicals aren't fond of Matthew 25:31–46. Comments on some areas with potential in the following states are presented in alphabetical order by state.

Alabama

First, the areas to avoid. The Birmingham metro area has well over a million people already. The Mobile metro area is over 400,000 people and located on the Gulf Coast; Mobile's official elevation is 10'. With some exceptions, the southern half of the state has a weaker economy and high poverty rates, but the northern half tends to be expensive. The following are some better positioned communities, of widely varying sizes.

- Huntsville at the hilly northern end of the state has over 200,000 people and is the center of a broader metro area of about half a million. Major economic sectors include aerospace, military technology, IT, software, engineering, research, and

manufacturing. There are three universities, including a state engineering school, and a community college. There are many caves in the Cumberland Plateau region, and Huntsville is home to the National Speleological Society. Amenities include a wide range of performing arts, several comedy venues, several craft breweries, and a botanical garden.

- Madison, over 55,000 people and rapidly growing, is part of Huntsville's metro area. There is a large software company, but many residents commute to Huntsville or work in retail or service jobs. The town is well-to-do and rents are above average. The recently arrived minor league baseball team, with a raccoon mascot, is called the Rocket City Trash Pandas—how cute is that?
- Montgomery, the mid-southeastern capital, is of similar size, 200,000 people, but has a smaller surrounding metro area. There is a diverse regional economy, including agricultural processing, trade and distribution, government and military, technology, professional services, health care, manufacturing, and education; there are several colleges and universities. Despite that, unemployment runs high in the city proper. The city has been working to revitalize the downtown and river-front; rent is higher than in smaller places but not extreme. Cultural amenities are numerous. Montgomery had an unpleas-ant reputation during the civil rights era, but is home to several museums and memorials acknowledging that history, and the current city government does not exclude African-Americans.
- Tuscaloosa to the west of Birmingham is a reasonably-sized city, about 100,000 with a fairly compact metro area. The economy includes government, retail, trade, manufacturing, tourism, finance, mining, healthcare, and education. It is home to the University of Alabama as well as a community college and the small but well-regarded HBCU Stillman. Dominant religions are Southern Baptism and Crimson Tide football. The city holds numerous holiday parades and festivals. Public transportation consists of limited weekday "trolley" routes (actually buses painted to resemble trolley cars). As you might

guess for such a nice place, housing costs are above the state average.

- Florence (about 40,000 people) in the northwest has a small state university. The economy includes manufacturing, the military, education, finance, retail and distribution, and services. Unemployment is generally lower than the state average. Local tourism sites include a 1500-year-old Native American mound, and it hosts Alabama's annual Renaissance Faire and an annual storytelling festival. Public transportation consists of a pricey regional dial-a-ride shuttle.
- Prattville (38,000 people) is northwest of Montgomery and part of its official metro area. Unemployment is much lower than in Montgomery proper and housing perhaps a little cheaper. Many residents commute to Montgomery, but the town also has a variety of manufacturing jobs as well as the usual education, health care, retail, etc. Many active-duty service members from the nearby Air Force base live there. Prattville is called The Fountain City for its many artesian wells. There's no city bus service.
- Auburn (according to some reports 76,000 people) in the east is a university town with a small metro area. Higher education (Auburn University), government, high-tech manufacturing, and services are major employers. Its location where the piedmont and coastal plains meet, combined with the tail end of the Appalachian foothills, makes it geologically interesting. There is no bus system and many streets lack sidewalks. Housing costs have recently shot up due to the construction of luxury high-rises by non-resident "investors," forcing many students into outlying mobile homes (Stuckey 2021).
- Opelika (about 30,000 people) is part of Auburn's metro area, offering jobs in health care, food processing, and manufacturing. It has a small community college.
- Dothan, a city of over 70,000 in the extreme southeast, is the center of the nation's peanut industry. It has several small colleges, including a community college. Health care, agribusiness, and manufacturing are among local employers.

There are some cultural events, including a large peanut festival. Public transportation is limited to a dial-a-ride service. The police seem to kill people with unusually high frequency.

- Troy in the southeast (but a bit inland) is a well-reputed college town of less than 18,000 people. Troy University is the biggest employer; there are also a variety of large and small companies including manufacturing (some aerospace), distribution, food processing and distilling, and retail. There's a bus for students only, and a limited dial-a-ride for townies. Unemployment, rent, and wages are all on the low side, and crime is above average. Expect a highly religious culture in city government and elsewhere.

Alabama has devoted little effort to public transportation, so a car might be useful or necessary for local business, but private long-distance services are well distributed. There's an Amtrak line that stops in Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, and Anniston, and a thruway service connecting Montgomery to the station in New Orleans. (Anniston, a small city but with serious problems, is not recommended.) Greyhound has stops in 34 towns or cities.

Arkansas

Arkansas is a state of about 3 million people, with over half a million each in the two metropolitan areas of Little Rock and Fayetteville. Both metro areas are reasonable enough in size and cost to be of interest to some migrants who need urban employment. Most of the state has lower population density with affordable housing and plenty of room for more people. Arkansas' motto is "The Natural State," and it is well placed for natural resources, with plenty of forests and farmland (Arkansas produces almost half of the nation's rice crop), as well as a significant steel industry, a developing film industry, and, in places, tourist industry driven by the attractive scenery and varied outdoor recreations.

Northwestern Arkansas, which includes the Fayetteville metro area, is becoming a local center of tech industry, with a few towns offering bonuses to get remote workers to move in. That region is the

home of several retail, transport/distribution, and agribusiness megacorps, including the politically powerful Walmart, which has encouraged many Walmart suppliers to set up offices in the area.

Arkansas has great potential (only) for people who want very conservative government: many counties are "dry," and the state's official booklet on senior services gives Sen. Tom Cotton two pages to rant about how he's saving seniors from a plot to destroy America by letting kids learn about slavery (Cotton 2021). Cities that might be considered include the following:

- Rogers in the northwest is a city of 70,000 people located towards the north end of the Fayetteville-to-Bentonville urbanized area, next to Bentonville. Rogers hosts a variety of manufacturing and food processing businesses, but the biggest employer is, unsurprisingly, Walmart. This region sees considerable tourism due to its beautiful scenery and many craft fairs and festivals. There are plenty of cultural activities in Rogers, which has a substantial Latino population. Housing is significantly more expensive than in some parts of Arkansas, but still below the national average.
- Bentonville (54,000 people) hosts the home office of Walmart and many satellite offices of Walmart suppliers. It is less affordable than Rogers, because the influx of corporate employees and business money has inflated housing costs to an above-average level. On the bright side, that money has also contributed to excellent cultural resources, such as a large free museum of American art. Bentonville has a significant community of Indian-American Walmart workers. A community college is located between Rogers and Bentonville. Residents say that Bentonville maintains a friendly, small-town feeling despite its growth; however, those who don't have a source of above-average income should not consider the place.
- Fayetteville (94,000 people), at the other end of the northwestern metro conglomeration, is likewise rapidly growing and rather expensive. It is home to the University of Arkansas, which receives support (and, of course, political

influence) from several of the megacorps based in the region. There's an attractive historic district and various cultural and recreational activities. This city has received astonishingly good reviews from residents. People are generally happy here.

- Siloam Springs (17,000 people) is in the extreme northwest, on the state line opposite West Siloam Springs, Oklahoma. It's known for its particularly beautiful downtown and high number of churches per capita. White people are most likely to feel welcome, although there's a sizeable Latino minority. There are several employers in the food processing and manufacturing sectors (including Simmons Foods, a major employer that also produces pet and livestock foods), and a modest tourism business for attractions along the Illinois River.
- Russellville (29,000 people) in the central northwest is politically dominated by Baptist churches (package liquor sales are banned, though you can drink at a restaurant or bar). There is a surprisingly diverse manufacturing base in the area and a STEM-focused university, Arkansas Tech, but local businesses are limited. Russellville is the home of Arkansas' only nuclear plant. Located on Lake Dardanelle, the town is a good spot for fishing, camping, and hiking; it also has some local cultural events and hosts the annual county fair.
- Mountain Home (ca. 13,000 people) in the central north is most welcoming to white conservative Christians. People who fit that definition enjoy its pleasant small-town atmosphere. Outdoor recreation is plentiful; one of the local rivers, the Buffalo National River, is free-flowing (undammed, a rarity in the U.S. these days) and home to an International Dark Sky Park. The local economy is not very diverse, but includes a variety of manufacturing, retail, health care, and old-age services (many of those white conservative Christians are retirees). There is a two-year Arkansas State University branch that works with local employers to create job-training programs. Through a local "promise" program, students who start at ASUMH soon after graduating from the town's high school can receive four semesters of free tuition.

- Searcy in the central-northeast is a town of about 23,000. It is in a dry county and, like the previous two, best suited for conservative Christians, especially white ones. Searcy is the home of a private Christian university, Harding University, a major employer that has a better academic reputation than a normal Bible college and provides more cultural resources to the town. There's also a small community college. Many residents are employed in distribution (especially for Walmart), food processing, and other manufacturing. Searcy is a surprisingly good food town given its size, demographics, and dry status, with independent restaurants representing some cultural diversity.
- Jonesboro in the northeast has about 76,000 people and a small metro area. It is home to Arkansas State University. Health care, retail, manufacturing, and food processing provide many more jobs. Sometimes called the City of Churches, Jonesboro has many cultural amenities (at modest scale, naturally), but the cost of living remains cheap. Has a small bus system.
- Batesville in the northeast is a historic town of some 11,000 people. There is a little ethnic diversity, primarily Latino. The local chicken processing industry provides poor air quality. However, many residents enjoy its peaceful, friendly small-town character.
- Fort Smith in the west has close to 90,000 people; its metro area includes counties in Arkansas and neighboring Oklahoma. The population includes Latino and Asian-American communities; there is a Spanish-language paper and two radio stations. Manufacturing, food processing, education, health care, retail, and the military provide employment; there is a diverse manufacturing base. There is a University of Arkansas branch baccalaureate/community college, a lively music scene, and several festivals, including a bistate state fair. Unemployment is a bit high, but Fort Smith is noted for its cheap housing and low crime. Has some public bus service. Recently announced that its aging water treatment system requires expensive upgrades to avoid catastrophic failure.

- Van Buren (about 23,000 people) is the second-largest city in the Fort Smith metro area and has many of the same economic sectors, emphasizing manufacturing, food processing (especially poultry), and health care. A former steamboat port on the Arkansas River, it would be at risk of severe flooding if its levees failed, but so far, so good. It is less diverse and more conservative than Fort Smith and people who are visibly nonconforming may become well acquainted with the police. Residents describe it as close-knit and boring. There's a pleasant historic district and lots of outdoor recreation.
- Little Rock (202,000 people) is the capital of Arkansas, and by far its most populous and diverse city (unlike the vast majority of places in Arkansas, there is a large Black population). It has an active river port, a valuable feature whose associated industrial park supplies thousands of jobs. There is a broad variety of corporate, non-profit, and government employment; health care is an important industry. There is a major medical school and a medium-sized state university. Arts and culture are plentiful. Little Rock is home to state schools for blind and deaf students. There is a good-sized transit network, which connects to several nearby suburbs, and an Amtrak stop. Cost of living is reasonable, but crime is high compared to most cities in the state, and some neighborhoods will be better avoided.
- Sherwood (33,000 people) is a suburb of Little Rock. It's greener and more peaceful, but has less diverse employment. It's considered family-friendly. Real estate is expensive by Arkansas standards, but not awful by national standards.
- Conway (64,000 people) is technically a distant suburb of Little Rock. It has many jobs in high-tech and education (there are three colleges, including the University of Central Arkansas) as well as manufacturing and advertising, though some residents find well-paying jobs hard to find. Conway offers many cultural institutions, including a professional Shakespeare company and the popular music festival Toad Suck Daze.

- Cabot (26,000 people) is also part of the broader Little Rock metro area, but maintains a rural feeling. It grew in the school-integration era as a home for "white flight" commuters working in Little Rock. It remains a bedroom community and extremely white, and minorities would be unlikely to feel welcome. Churches are numerous. The county is dry, except for Cabot's two country clubs and the VFW post. This sounds like hell to me, but someone will probably like the sound of it.
- Texarkana on the southwestern border is the center of a modest metro area. The city proper includes about 65,000 people split between the two sides of the border; the Arkansas and Texas halves are separate municipalities. Major employers include the military, logistics, transport, distribution, manufacturing, healthcare, and retail; there are Texas and Arkansas state community college branches and a medical school. This city has more economic challenges than some others, and poverty remains high, but costs of living are low. There is an Amtrak stop.

Unusually for the region, Arkansas takes public transportation seriously, spends money to manage it, and makes useful information about transit readily available. The state (except a central area) is broken down into eight regional systems with regular service at varying levels within those systems, and there are a few long-distance bus lines. These provide service to all the expected large to medium-sized cities plus close to twenty small towns, most of which are really too small or insular to be welcoming to outsiders, even if on paper they look promising. Amtrak stops, in addition to Little Rock and Texarkana, include Hope, Arkadelphia, and Malvern in the southwest and the very small Walnut Ridge in the northeast.

Georgia

Six million of Georgia's less than 11 million people live in the northwestern Atlanta metropolitan area. Augusta, on the eastern border, has a metro area population of 600,000. The third-largest metro area is Savannah in the southeast, 400,000 people, along the

Atlantic Coast in the high-risk zone. That tells you which areas may be most unsustainable.

If conservative government is your main reason for choosing a Southern state, note that Georgia's demographics are now such that, if everyone gets to vote, the state is now purple. The state government is trying to ensure that not everyone does get to vote, but as of this writing there's a significant backlash to their efforts resulting in high turnout by newly empowered African-American voters, who are mostly Democrats. It's difficult to imagine this state staying out of the Confederacy if the Union splits up, between its cultural ties and its geographic location. However, if that were really important to you, this might not be a safe bet.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of small cities that have good-looking economic numbers are located within the Atlanta metropolitan area. That area encompasses several whole counties, so some portions are more urban than others, but still, you shouldn't want to add to that level of sprawl. Inland cities with more modest metro areas tend to have above-average unemployment rates, so migrants might not be easily employed. Rural areas, including large parts of the southern and eastern portions of the state, are generally quite poor and, unless you want to buy a farm, have few economic opportunities for outsiders. For these reasons I'd suggest that out-of-state migrants should not consider Georgia as a destination. Here are a few examples of smaller urban areas that might be of interest to current residents thinking of leaving Atlanta:

- Augusta has close to 200,000 people in the city proper, which is majority-minority. Major economic sectors include the military (Fort Austin), health care, biotech, cybersecurity, manufacturing, distribution, food processing, and data processing. Augusta University, a public university, is among the largest employers; there is also a technical college. The Augusta National Golf Club hosts The Masters golf tournament on its gorgeous course, but you'll never get to play there. The Hyde Park neighborhood is toxic and to be avoided. Cost of

living is cheap, and Augusta is a good foodie town. Unusually for the region, Augusta has a substantial, affordable bus system.

- Columbus in the west is about the same size. Its metro area is smaller (about 330,000, or close to half a million if cities and towns on the Alabama side of the border are included), but because of its location, Kurtz et al. (2020) estimate that it would require quite a large foodshed. By far the biggest employer is Fort Benning; other major employers are in banking and insurance, health care, government, education, and manufacturing. There are some small or branch colleges, a variety of museums and public facilities, nine historic districts, and a bus system.
- Warner Robins is a city of about 80,000 in west-central Georgia that is part of the Macon broader metro area. Macon is badly deteriorated, with few good jobs and high crime; it is not recommended. Warner Robins has better average incomes, making housing more affordable to residents. The biggest employer is Robins Air Force Base, and government agencies and defense companies employ many more. Some neighborhoods are rather seedy. A new private company provides limited, expensive fixed-route bus service and a shockingly expensive dial-a-ride; the county has a public intercity dial-a-ride that's more reasonable.
- Athens, to the east of Atlanta, has almost 130,000 people and hosts the "public Ivy" University of Georgia; there's also a technical college. It's viewed as as a friendly college town with plenty of cultural and entertainment options, including a lively alternative music scene and botanical garden. Taking advantage of the well-educated population, local industries include technology, biotech, pharmaceuticals, publishing, and music recording. There's a seven-day bus service and bicycling is encouraged. You might well see this city as a more reasonably priced and sized alternative to Atlanta.
- Gainesville (40,000 people) is at the northeast extreme of the broader Atlanta metro area. It's a couple of counties away from the city proper, so housing is not cheap but not exorbitant.

> Gainesville bills itself as the world's poultry capital due to the large number of chicken processing plants (an ill-paid and exploitative industry even in non-pandemic times). There is also a medical center and four small colleges or universities, including a technical college. Beautiful scenery, world-class fishing at Lake Lanier, shopping, and hospitality attract tourism. A large minority of the population is Hispanic, many working for agribusiness. Recently got a dial-a-ride van service, has an Amtrak stop.

Kentucky

Kentucky is very rural, except for the metro areas of Louisville on the northwestern border (well over a million people) and the Lexington-Frankfort-Fayette area (well over half a million). There are many tiny unincorporated communities and "historically black hamlets." Most counties are "dry" (still prohibiting alcohol sales) or "moist" (permitting sales only at certain businesses in certain cities, typically businesses owned by the rich or corporations, e.g., only restaurants with 100 seats or more). There are some local intercity bus services, but no central source of information about service. Only Maysville, South Portsmouth and Ashland in the north and the tiny Fulton in the southwest have Amtrak stops, though thruway service from several towns is available. Even Greyhound service is rather meager, with only 15 stops now listed in the state, including Berea.

If you want mountains, Appalachian culture, and conservative government, I think that Tennessee is more appealing. However, Kentucky's potential for sustainability appears pretty good, following Day and Hall (2016) and Kurtz et al. (2022). The economy in smaller cities in general is not stellar, though usually not terrible. Most small towns with better economic numbers are clustered around the metro areas. Rural Appalachia is known for its insularity and I do not recommend moving to an isolated community unless you have family connections. Midsized to small cities that do not belong to the Louisville, Lexington-Frankfort, or Cincinnati bistate metro areas include the following:

- Bowling Green in the west (72,000 people) has a diverse manufacturing economy and many jobs in health care, higher education, and retail. Home of Western Kentucky University and a community college. Has a Greyhound stop.
- Madisonville (19,000 people) has an economy that emphasizes manufacturing, which has declined in recent years. Some residents complain that good jobs are hard to find. There is a community college that offers some bachelor's degrees. In a moist county. Has a Greyhound stop.
- Owensboro (60,000 people) in the northwest has major economic sectors including health care, banking, retail, manufacture, and distilling. The town holds barbecue, bluegrass, and pumpkin festivals and weekly outdoor summer concerts. It has a bluegrass museum, a botanical garden, and one of the oldest synagogues in the U.S. Has a Greyhound stop.
- Henderson (28,000 people) to the west of Owensboro employs many people in manufacturing, agriculture and food processing, and government. There is a community college. Known for nearby natural areas and festivals centered on barbecue, bluegrass and folklife, and arts and crafts.
- Elizabethtown (31,000 people) in the central region is near Fort Knox, a major local employer. Elizabethtown has a variety of employers in manufacturing, distribution, health care, education, and retail/services, and has a community college. In a moist county.
- Radcliff (23,000 people) is part of the Elizabethtown metro area and borders Fort Knox, a major employer which is responsible for increasing the town's ethnic and cultural diversity. Tourism, often military-related, brings in some business. There is a small university and a bourbon distillery.
- Richmond (35,000 people) is 20 minutes south of Lexington and is the home of Eastern Kentucky University. Services and manufacturing are major economic sectors. Has a good reputation as a friendly, affordable small town.
- Berea (15,000 people) is about 15 minutes' drive from Richmond, where some residents go to shop, especially for

alcohol as Berea is dry. It is home to the Kentucky Artisan Center, Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen, and Berea College. Berea College, a private Christian liberal arts college, was the first interracial and co-educational college in the South and has a work-study, zero-tuition-bill program. There is some manufacturing in the area, especially of auto parts. Has a Greyhound stop.

- Ashland (21,000 people) in the far northeast is just across the Ohio River from Huntington, West Virginia. The biggest employer is a major medical center; there is a nearby federal prison. There is a community college. The town has been declining for years and the recent closure of a steel mill won't help, but unemployment is moderate. Poverty and drugs are problems. Has a Greyhound stop and, surprisingly, a local bus service.
- Shelbyville (17,000 people) is between Louisville and Frankfort, about half an hour east of Louisville. Enough commuters use it as a bedroom community that housing prices are not cheap, though rent is still sane. The economy includes retail, service, manufacturing, and agriculture. Shelbyville bills itself as the Saddlebred Capital of the World and holds an annual horse show.
- Campbellsville (over 11,000 people) is home to Campbellsville University, which is about as large as the town. Housing is cheap, but incomes are low. Since industry has declined, the biggest employers include the university, the hospital, and an Amazon fulfillment center. There is also a recently built detention and rehab center; residents complain of increasing drug problems. There is a regional intercity bus service.

Louisiana

Louisiana as a whole is more French- (and Catholic-)influenced than any other state; for example, the state is administratively divided into parishes rather than counties. As noted, southern Louisiana's heavily French-influenced Cajun culture is unique in the United States; many residents still speak a Louisiana dialect of French as

their first language. Most Cajuns are rural, attached to the land, and not wealthy enough to move readily. Sadly, sea level rise plus land subsidence due to fossil fuel extraction is chewing away at the land rural residents need to live on, and many places are heavily poisoned by the chemical industry. Parts of the largest city, New Orleans, are already below sea level; that will become increasingly difficult to manage. Already, after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, poorer neighborhoods were never fully rebuilt. An increasing number of residents will be forced out of their homes in future, and for them, communities farther north in Louisiana will often be the most congenial choice. Out-of-state Anglophones who just like gumbo should perhaps refrain from taking up space in those communities.

Local residents with deep cultural ties may have family in smaller communities outside the red zone; if so, that should guide your choice of destination. If not, larger communities might be better. Unfortunately, most of the population centers are far enough south to be risky. Louisiana is a generally poor and violent state, and even small cities can have very high crime rates, so to save time, just assume that's true unless otherwise stated. Here are some of the options that seem better.

- Baton Rouge (214,000 people), the capital, is fairly far south, a port city on the Mississippi River, with Cajun influences in the local culture. It is just above the area of highest risk coming from the Gulf, but the river floods relatively often. It is relatively liberal and is the center of the largest metro in the state outside the ultra-high-risk New Orleans (over 850,000 people regionally), so could be of interest to people migrating from New Orleans. The diverse, though polluter-dominated economy includes shipping, oil refining, chemical and high-tech manufacturing industries, health care, higher education, government (including the military), a film industry, and more. It's the home of multiple colleges and universities, including Louisiana State University, Southern University, and a good-sized community college. There's a not-so-great bus system and paratransit, Greyhound bus service, and Amtrak thruway

service to the line that goes through New Orleans, so long as it does. It is recently reported (Sneath 2022) that the aquifer supplying the city's currently high-quality drinking water is being overdrawn without limits by powerful industries, especially Exxon, leading to saltwater intrusion that may soon render the water undrinkable.

- Alexandria (45,000 people) is centrally located amid the Kisatchie National Forest on the Red River, which connects to the Mississippi. It has a historical French Acadian influence but is now fairly diverse; there's a Jewish community with two synagogues. The economy emphasizes manufacturing, shipping (especially of fossil fuels), and health care; poverty is common. There are branch university and technical college campuses. Alexandria is known for its festivals and Mardi Gras celebrations. Cultural amenities include a performing arts center and zoo. There is a bus system and Greyhound service.
- Shreveport (188,000 people) is also located in the Red River, in the northwestern corner of the state, and in the center of a medium-sized metro area. Formerly dominated by the oil industry, it has been in decline for decades, with high unemployment and poverty. Currently, thanks to the Great Resignation, unemployment is relatively low. Shreveport is the site of various corporate headquarters and facilities, with an Amazon fulfillment center (not a source of good jobs...) in the works, and service industries and health care employ many people. Casino gambling is a big business, and there is a film industry presence. There are several institutions of higher education, including public four- and two-year colleges and medical and nursing schools. Religious diversity is fairly high for Louisiana. Shreveport has a town bus system that connects to Bossier City (see below) and there's Greyhound service and rather irrationally organized thruway service to Amtrak.
- Bossier City (63,000 people) is part of the Shreveport metro area, on the other side of the Red River. It's slightly better-off and safer than Shreveport, but housing isn't (or hasn't been) exorbitant yet. Major employers include the U.S. Air Force, the

gambling industry (casinos and a racetrack), healthcare, and retail and other service sectors. Residents consider it to have a small-town feeling, perhaps just by comparison to Shreveport. There are plenty of festivals, arts, and other cultural opportunities.

- Monroe (48,000 people) is in the northeast. Residents are employed in education, health care, banking and finance, insurance, business, telecommunications, retail, and manufacturing; there is a public university branch and a community college. Wages are not high, but cost of living is low. Monroe has a variety of museums and cultural institutions. There is a Muslim community. Monroe has a long-running public transit system and Greyhound service.
- Natchitoches (37,000 people) is in the northern part of the state, northwest of Alexandria. It used to be on the Red River, which channel-shifted and left the town on an oxbow lake that is popular with college rowing teams. The town dates back to 1714 and has an attractive historic district. The economy was terrible for a while but has since greatly rebounded, though some residents still complain of limited jobs and wages. Major industries include tourism, forestry, and shipping. The town hosts a public college, technical college, and state honors college. It is known for its famous Christmas festival and National Fish Hatchery.

These are some of the more promising small towns:

- Minden (12,000 people) is in the north, east of Shreveport; it's a historic town with little to do, but considered family friendly. Incomes are low and jobs limited, with some manufacturing (Fibrebond, which recently had to threaten to leave to get some bridges rebuilt), health care, and the usual low-wage service jobs predominating.
- Ruston (22,000 people) is a college town, home of the highly-rated Louisiana Tech, which provides cultural and sporting events. The economy includes timber and agriculture (peach

farming, with an annual Peach Festival, and livestock) as well as the usual health care, education, etc., and some IT and financial services. There is a community college branch campus, and public schools are well rated. Outdoor recreation is popular. The town has an attractive historic district and an active arts community. Most residents find Ruston pleasant, and it is a popular retirement destination. There is Greyhound bus service.

- Pineville (14,000 people) is part of the Alexandria metro area. Many residents commute to Alexandria for jobs, but there are several manufacturing and health care employers in town. It's family-friendly and churchy, with alcohol sales in restaurants only recently permitted.
- DeRidder (10,000 people) is toward the western edge of the state, relatively southern. It has notably moderate crime rates by state standards. Residents who don't mind its Baptist character are generally happy. There's a historic business district that still has some independent small businesses, and several manufacturing and food processing employers.
- Denham Springs (over 9000 people) is a suburb of Baton Rouge. It's politically conservative with a small-town feeling and is considered quite nice, with good schools; housing is more reasonable than in Prairieville, another "nice" suburb.
- Eunice (over 9000 people) is south-central, north of Lafayette, which means still fairly close to the red zone. It has a noted Cajun and Creole culture, with an Acadian cultural center and the Cajun Music Hall of Fame. Residents enjoy a variety of cultural events celebrating French and Cajun heritage. The town is a bit poor and seedy, but cheap. Employment will be largely in the usual sort of small-town jobs (construction, retail and hospitality, banking and insurance services, health care). There's a community college.

Long-distance public transportation is not great in Louisiana, and many of the communities served are in the higher-risk southern third of the state. In many places, a car will be necessary.

Mississippi

Mississippi is a very rural state. The largest city, in a state of about 3 million, is Jackson, the capital, which has 426,000 people in the entire metropolitan area. Kurtz et al. (2020) concluded that Mississippi is well placed for sustainability in terms of food supplies even given present diets, unlike some other Southern states whose large cities would not be easily provisioned locally. Mississippi has well-known problems—poverty, unemployment, inequality, infant mortality, poor education and health care—that are worse than in most Southern states. If those things don't trouble you or you don't think they'll affect you, Mississippi might be pre-adapted for decline.

For those who need urban jobs or amenities, Jackson is certainly big enough. The city proper has about 160,000 people. It is home to several colleges and universities and many cultural institutions, and has a generally liberal city government that most Southeastward-looking migrants would dislike. The regional economy is quite diverse, but poverty and unemployment are persistent problems; that plus the large population means that crime is far above average. Therefore it is not recommended for anyone who isn't really devoted to big city life.

Smaller cities and towns that might be considered include the following.

- Hattiesburg (about 49,000 people) in the south is home to the University of Southern Mississippi. It is about 75 miles from the coast, close enough to be subject to hurricane damage. There is a variety of manufacturing and corporate headquarters, and a large National Guard training base. Hattiesburg has a large historic district that puts on a popular Victorian Christmas display. Has a city bus service and an Amtrak stop.
- Meridian in the east (35,000 people), the "Queen City," is a historic railroad town. Major economic sectors include distribution, manufacturing, health care, retail, and the military. Outdoor recreation, antiquing, a historic carousel, music history, community festivals, and Mississippi arts and

children's museums draw tourists. There are nine historic districts known for lovely architecture, a community college and a tiny state university branch, and a good variety of performing arts (but no mass transit). The town is majority-Black and aggressively gerrymandered to limit residents' voice in the legislature. Population has been declining, leaving room for newcomers. Has an Amtrak stop.

- Vicksburg (ca. 22,000 people) at the western edge of the state is at the confluence of the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers. It has a large river port, four casinos, three large U.S. Army Corps of Engineers facilities, and a paper mill. Unemployment and poverty are above average, though the city is in a good location for the future.
- Brookhaven (12,000 people) in the southwest hosts the state's boarding high school for the arts. Economy seems to be mostly retail and service, though there is some manufacturing. Local schools are de facto segregated. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Laurel in the southeast (17,000 people) has some manufacturing employers, notably door manufacturer Masonite International. Home of Ben and Erin Napier, hosts of the HGTV series "Home Town." A very quiet town with not much to do; residents indicate that being a white evangelical will make residents' experience significantly better. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Oxford (25,000 people), the central-northern home of the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), is quite a lovely town. It has an active music scene and a charming downtown with many independent small businesses. There's a small community college branch campus. Real estate is pricey, so the town has a higher cost of living than any of the others mentioned. There is a local bus service that is free to Ole Miss students, but no easy way out of town without a private car.

The northeastern section of the state has particular promise. It has three relatively promising small cities and is otherwise sparsely populated, so that it could easily make room for many more people.

However, for the population to grow, some migrants will need to consider communities that are smaller than would be a good risk in most regions.

- Tupelo (38,000 people) in the northeast has a diverse economy including banking and finance, retail, transport and distribution, manufacturing, tourism, and healthcare. It is home to the fundamentalist American Family Association. There are satellite campuses of the University of Mississippi and a Fulton, MS community college. Tupelo was the birthplace of Elvis Presley and there are some related tourist attractions. Tupelo is reputed to be a good place to live.
- Starkville (24,000 people) is a college town in the northeast, though well south of Tupelo. It is the home of Mississippi State University, the state's largest university. Starkville has been labeled by a state program as a Certified Retirement City for its quality of life, affordable costs, and access to health care, and has several assisted living or nursing facilities.
- Columbus (24,000 people) is close to Starkville. The economy includes manufacturing (especially defense), health care, and the military. Columbus is home to the Mississippi University for Women and a STEM-focused boarding high school for gifted students. The town was known for doing a better job of integrating its schools than most Mississippi cities.
- West Point is near Starkville and Columbus. It currently has about 10,000 people and has been declining in population, with many retirees. There are a few manufacturing employers. It's majority African-American and more liberal than most towns in Mississippi. Churches are an important part of social life.
- New Albany, northwest of Tupelo, has less than 8000 people and is declining in size. It's considered to be a friendly community. There are some jobs in manufacturing and retail, and some locally owned businesses; many of the population are retirees. There's a historic downtown and a park along the Tallahatchie River, and the town is located on or near several hiking and biking trails.

- Amory, southeast of Tupelo, has fewer than 7000 people. There are some jobs in sectors including manufacturing, wood pulp processing, and health care. It's a historic railroad town with an annual railroad festival. It boasts affordable, attractive housing, a functioning downtown with some independent businesses, and a pleasant small-town atmosphere.

The South's history of segregation continues to play a role in the modern era. Some of the listed towns are majority-Black, and these often have high poverty rates. Mississippi has limited regional bus service, but has two Amtrak lines that traverse the state. All but two of Mississippi's 17 Greyhound stops are in the western part of the state, and some relatively obvious destinations (e.g., Oxford, the home of a major university) are not served. A car is probably to be considered essential at present.

Missouri

Missouri, in Colin Woodard's (2012) take on American regional cultures, is Appalachian in the southern half and Midlands in the northern half. It has two large, diverse metropolitan areas, Kansas City and St. Louis, at the western and eastern edges of the state respectively. However, its government is entirely dominated by the rural areas, and in the present climate of what Will Wilkinson (2021) terms the "Southernification of rural America," we may presume that it would join the Confederacy or Red republic if the Union broke up today, whatever the urbanites might think of that.

The two metropolitan areas mentioned sprawl out across counties, and fall into the too-big-to-consider category even for one who is not a dedicated rural conservative. A large majority of the smaller cities with strong economies are satellites of one of the two big cities. The southwestern corner of the state, among other regions, was heavily contaminated by the lead-mining industry and cities that haven't done aggressive cleanup may harbor significant environmental hazards (e.g., McClanahan 2020). Many small towns are plagued by low-wage agribusiness jobs, meth and other drugs, and high crime.

Communities with potential in other regions, primarily the central part of the state, include the following.

- Columbia, the home of the University of Missouri, has over 125,000 people. It is rapidly growing, putting upward pressure on rents and house prices. There are many jobs in academia, health care, insurance and banking, and technology and a broad range of cultural and entertainment options. Be advised that it is a blue island. There is a town bus system.
- Jefferson City (about 43,000 people), the centrally located capital, is on the Missouri River. It has a diverse economy, including government, education, health care, manufacturing, and tourism. It has several small colleges and universities and a bus service. Residents are generally conservative, religious, and largely white.
- Rolla (20,000 people) is a college town with plenty of outdoor recreational opportunities. The Missouri University of Science & Technology, a respected engineering school, is the biggest employer. There is a Wal-Mart distribution center and some manufacturing employment (pet food, semiconductors, packaging) but low-wage work, drugs, and crime are problems. Local culture is small-town and conservative.
- Warrensburg (19,000 people) in west-central Missouri is a college town, home of the University of Central Missouri. House prices have climbed, though rent is still affordable, and jobs are scarce enough that many residents commute long-distance to Kansas City. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Washington (14,000 people) on the Missouri River is a very pleasant, extremely white town with a historic downtown. It's in an area that attracts winery tourism and has parks and natural scenery. The many local businesses include the world's largest manufacturer of corncob pipes. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Moberly (14,000 people), half an hour from Columbia, has the usual small-town problems of limited jobs and low wages. It has a Bible college and a community college.

- Marshall (13,000 people) is in a similar situation. A main employer is a Conagra frozen foods plant. It has a small private college.
- Fulton (13,000 people) has a charming downtown. It is home to two small private colleges and the Missouri School for the Deaf. Property crime is high enough that one suspects drugs are a big issue.
- Mexico (over 11,000 people) has a community college satellite campus and is home to the Missouri Military Academy. Shopping and employment are limited.

Some communities from the more rural northern and southern ends of the state are also worth considering. The environment and culture of these regions are rather different. The southeastern Ozark Mountains region is economically in worse shape than the rest of the state and has less to offer in terms of employment. It has no large cities, and you should not want to move to a small town without connections there. Some towns in these regions include:

- In the northwest, St. Joseph is large enough (72,000 people) to have many amenities and a diverse economy, including food processing, agribusiness including veterinary pharmaceuticals, packaging, manufacturing, health care, retail, and education. It's located on the Missouri River. There is a small state university, a parkway system, and a bus service. Unemployment is fairly low, but crime is high and residents complain of bad neighborhoods, homelessness, and political corruption. This is a city that has significant problems, but that should have real potential.
- Excelsior Springs (ca. 12,000 people) is part of the broader Kansas City metro area but outside the dense central core. It has a few businesses employing people in manufacturing and distribution. Jobs and shopping are limited, but crime and cost of living reasonably low. Residents enjoy community Christmas events.

- In the southeast, Jackson (15,000 people) is well regarded, low in crime, and known for its beautiful parks. As such, it's a bit pricier than most of the cited small Missouri communities. There are jobs in manufacturing, retail, and banking. It is friendly but conservative and lacking in diversity.

Missouri has a relatively good variety of local and county transit systems, and two regional systems that serve respectively 87 counties (OATS) and 21 southeastern counties (SMTS), with some counties left uncovered. OATS has a shared-ride system that, with advance scheduling, transports residents to larger cities with services; regular county routes often run only one day per month. Greyhound serves over 30 communities for long-distance service, including all the medium-sized cities mentioned, plus the smaller communities of Moberly, Rolla, and Fulton.

South Carolina

The large cities in South Carolina include Charleston on the coast, Columbia in the center, and Greenville in the northwest. All three have metro areas in the 800,000 to 900,000 range. Charleston is a truly lovely city, but given its location in the high-risk flood and hurricane zone, best not added to. The foodshed mapping of Kurtz et al. (2020) suggested that Greenville might require quite a large foodshed even with a low-meat diet. Columbia is more easily provisioned but its metro area, which sprawls over six counties, is likely to be larger than you want.

South Carolina does not seem to be the most promising state for conservative migrants to consider, unless you want to move to one of the big cities, which I don't recommend. Smaller cities frequently appear to have chronic economic issues or shockingly high crime rates that are suggestive of such issues. A few of the most promising that are located away from the coast or the metros are the following:

- Sumter (40,000 people) hosts four colleges or universities and a large Air Force base; its economy includes manufacturing and food processing. Cultural amenities include Swan Lake Iris

Gardens, which is known for its iris festival and multiple species of resident swans. There is some public transportation.

- Aiken (32,000 people) was formerly a winter home for rich northerners, and its housing prices are higher than those in less fancy communities. Major employers include a huge nuclear waste processing and storage company and the U.S. military. It is home to a small but well-regarded University of South Carolina campus and a steeplechase association, and is known for its multiple polo fields. Aiken has well over a century of Jewish immigrant history, and a synagogue celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2021.
- North Augusta (24,000 people) is on the state line across from Augusta, Georgia and is part of the Augusta metro area. However, housing costs and crime are still moderate and small-town charm and attitudes may be encountered. As for the nearby Aiken, major employers include Savannah River Nuclear Solutions and the military. There is a nearby community of Irish Travelers.
- Rock Hill (over 75,000 people) is part of the Charlotte, NC metro area, which has raised its housing costs to a level I'd consider excessive, but certainly cheaper than Charlotte. Economic sectors include manufacturing and engineering, retail, telecommunications, banking, health, and education, but many residents commute to Charlotte and there is an express bus connecting the two cities. The Carolina Panthers NFL team is building a major training facility in Rock Hill. There are three colleges, including a technical/ community college. Rock Hill is known for several high-quality, popular annual festivals. It has a limited, but free weekday electric bus service and moderately priced weekday dial-a-ride, and bicycling is supported.
- Florence (40,000 people) is a historic railroad town whose economy now emphasizes commerce and distribution as well as finance, insurance, health care, retail, and manufacturing. Its economy has been strong in recent years. Florence is home to a small public university and a technical college. There is a bus

service that also offers connections to nearby towns and cities. Crime and poverty rates are high; nevertheless, residents usually find the town pleasant.

Sumter, Aiken, and Florence have Greyhound service. There is surprisingly good Amtrak service in South Carolina, with three lines and 11 stops, but most of those stops are in places you probably don't want to live in.

Tennessee

Tennessee is one of the more promising parts of this region if you want, or don't mind, a very right-wing government. The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) reports population growth in most of its counties, not only the urban counties, which suggests that smaller towns are doing a good job of being livable for their residents. Geographically and culturally it has much in common with Kentucky, but there are more towns of moderate size where a migrant might find a home, and it appears to be better managed in some ways that will become important in future. On the downside (IMHO), partly because state law makes it easy to use public parks as one pleases, the state has become a meeting place for hordes of white nationalists (Allison 2017).

The Nashville metro area exceeds 2 million people (extending to such cities as Hendersonville and Murfreesboro), and the Memphis region 1.3 million. Though Knoxville and Chattanooga have fewer than 200,000 people each, the surrounding metro area is over 860,000 for the former, 540,000 for the latter. Most migrants will wish to avoid all of these as too large. More acceptable places might include the following:

- Clarksville, at the northern edge of the state, has a population over 165,000 and a metro area over 300,000. Employing industries include a diverse array of manufacturers as well as the military, IT, and education; it is home to a state university and community and technical colleges. Usually has above-average unemployment, but at the moment not much worse

than the country as a whole. Housing is more expensive than in smaller towns.

- Columbia (42,000 people) to the south of Nashville is known for its historic antebellum architecture and weeklong mule festival. There is a variety of manufacturing in the area, and the city is constructing an industrial park to attract more. Columbia is home to a community college.
- Cookeville (35,000 people) offers jobs in health care, retail, services, manufacturing, distribution, transportation, education, and government. It is the home of Tennessee Technological University. There are a variety of performing arts in the region and three state parks. Housing is affordable, though students complain of exploitative landlords.
- Shelbyville (22,000 people) is famous for pen and pencil manufacturing and for hosting the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration. There are several other major manufacturing and distribution businesses and a technical college. However, local jobs are limited.
- Tullahoma (20,000 people) hosts several aerospace businesses; it has a community college and a state university graduate aerospace engineering institute. There is public broadband, and the schools are good. Some residents complain that there is crime and meth, but this is true of virtually every affordable town in Tennessee.
- McMinnville (about 14,000 people) and its county are known as the "nursery capital of the world," with about 450 nursery businesses and great growing weather. It would be a good place for a person with a horticulture degree to get work, though wages are not high. The local culture is such that only conservative Christians would likely be welcome or happy. An extensive cave system (Cumberland Caverns) and lovely state park are nearby.
- Lewisburg (12,000 people) has suffered from factory closures, but the region still offers some manufacturing jobs as well as catering to agriculture. The town is the home of the Tennessee

Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association. Local police killed a jail inmate on video in 2020.

- Crossville (over 11,000 people) claims to be the golf capital of Tennessee, with 12 courses in the area. It is considered to be very conservative (with large KKK meetings in the area, though most attendees are outsiders) and to have a significant meth problem.
- Lawrenceburg (about 11,000 people) near the southern border is home to the Vaughan School of Music. There are some well-paying factory jobs and some reliance on tourism; "David Crockett State Park" is nearby and annual events include Davy Crockett's birthday, a gospel music festival, and a fair. There is a small community college. The town is conservative, homogenous, and perhaps a bit run-down.
- Manchester (less than 11,000 people) hosts the huge annual Bonnaroo music festival. Residents consider it a quiet, conservative town with plenty of outdoor recreation.

Larger towns at the west end of the state include the following.

- Jackson (68,000 people) usually has unemployment slightly above the state average, and high crime is a persistent problem. The economy emphasizes retail and services, health care, and manufacturing. Jackson has a community college, private religious colleges, and the West Tennessee School for the Deaf. It is known as the birthplace of rockabilly music.
- Martin (over 10,000 people) is the home of the University of Tennessee–Martin, which is not particularly well reputed academically but is known for its beautiful, safe campus and concern for sustainability. Martin is a small, conservative town with low crime rates. It may be hard for an outsider to find a job, and wages are often low. Attractions include a historic downtown and a soybean festival.

The northeastern corner of the state is conservative, lacking in diversity, and high in violence and poverty; still, people who can fit

in might find opportunities here, and the scenery is beautiful. Some of the "towns" listed by City-data in this region appear to be unincorporated areas or villages whose population centers have a small fraction of the claimed size. Outsiders should not consider moving to very small towns. Cities or towns that might be of most interest to migrants include the following.

- Johnson City (71,000 people) is the largest city in the Tri-Cities region and a regional shopping center. Major employers include East Tennessee State University, health care (including colleges of pharmacy and medicine), and a nearby chemical plant; there are also jobs in other manufacture, banking and telecommunications. Bus service and walkability are limited. There are some big-city issues and housing is not as cheap as in small towns, but schools are well reputed.
- Bristol (27,000 people) is on the state line, across from Bristol, Virginia. It has an economy emphasizing retail and health care. Bristol is considered the birthplace of country music; there is a country music museum and a motor speedway. The town is very white, and transplants warn that Yankees might not fit in well.
- Greeneville (15,000 people) has employment in retail, health care, and some manufacturing (including a greeting card company). Housing is cheap and there are plans to redevelop the downtown. There are several elder care facilities. The Appalachian National Forest provides outdoor recreation. Though there is a drug problem (like everywhere else in the region) and some residents complain of corruption, Greeneville seems to be friendlier than many small Appalachian towns. It hosts a particularly good county fair and, though largely white, holds an annual Street Dance on Davis celebration that honors local Black history.

There are regional transportation systems in Tennessee, and the state cares enough to pay attention to them. In a recent assessment (TranSystems 2017) it suggested that service was adequate, but that

efforts should be made to add stops in certain areas. Long-distance bus service is provided primarily by Greyhound, with stops in all the towns recommended above but Shelbyville; McMinnville is indirectly connected to a bus route via a state-supported feeder line. Amtrak stops are located in the west in Memphis and Newbern-Dyersburg.

Texas

Texas, as Marche (2022a) suggested, is a unique place that could well end up as its own nation post-America. I noted before that Texas is going to have severe sustainability issues, with the western half subject to drought, the southeastern part subject to hurricanes, the electrical grid subject to collapse in extreme weather due to deliberate neglect. It also has severe political issues; as the population edges closer to majority-minority, both gerrymandering and anti-voting laws get ever more extreme (e.g., one can be charged with a felony for helping another person to navigate the hoops that must be jumped through to register to vote). The government has dedicated itself completely to the culture war and servitude to big business, and has little interest in seeing that the public's needs are met or even that their lights and heat stay on. If you want theocratic government, you can get it in a smaller, wetter, less bizarrely managed state farther east; avoid Texas.

However, if you're already living in Texas in a big city that's being aggressively targeted by the legislature (e.g., Austin), getting out into a smaller city or town could be in your interest, whatever your personal politics are. Unfortunately, Texas is enormous (as residents already know) and highly auto-centric; intercity public transportation is very limited. If you move to a dinky town, much of your shopping or health care will absolutely require you to have a car and plenty of gas. It's heresy in Texas to suggest that those things might ever be inaccessible, but if you're wise, you'll pick a residence that has all the amenities you really need on a regular basis. Here are some smaller cities outside the mega-cities that might suit.

- Abilene (125,000 people) is getting into the dry zone, about as far west as you would dare to go in Texas. The economy includes the military (there is a nearby Air Force base) and other government, education, health care, manufacturing, and oil extraction. There are six small colleges or branch campuses, three religious. Evangelicalism is powerful. Abilene has all the basic cultural amenities expected of a good-sized city and hosts a variety of special events.
- Brenham (17,000) is a college town northwest of Houston, home of the large, well-reputed Blinn junior college. It is the home of Blue Bell Creameries and Texas' largest residential facility for the intellectually disabled. The town promotes wildflower tourism, and has a German heritage festival and the "world's largest barbeque pit." There is no intercity bus service.
- Bryan (84,000) and College Station (120,000) are close together, farther northwest of Houston and east of Austin. The largest employer in the area is Texas A&M University, located in College Station; other large employers are in the areas of education (including Blinn College, which has multiple branches), health, software, food processing, engineering and research, telecommunications, retail, and fossil fuels. There's a federal women's prison in Bryan. There is a bus system and buses to Houston are available.
- Taylor (17,000) and Hutto (25,000) are close together, northeast of Austin and on the fringe of the metro area. Major economic sectors in Taylor include manufacturing, energy, and the detention of undocumented migrants. Taylor has an Amtrak stop. Hutto's housing is far more expensive, apparently because the place is growing fast due to its undoubted desirability; many residents commute to Austin. Hutto has a junior college branch campus, and is known as the Hippo Capital of Texas due to its more than 3000 concrete hippos. (That is not a typo, and some of this stuff I have to assure you that I haven't made up.)
- Lufkin (35,000) in the east hosts the headquarters of Texas' national forests and grasslands. The economy includes

manufacturing (e.g., paper, products for the energy industry), food and meat processing, and education. There is a community college and a historic downtown.

- Nacogdoches (33,000) near Lufkin is home to Stephen F. Austin State University. Education, meat processing, and health care are major employers. The town is known for its historic district and blueberry festival, and is mostly considered to be friendly.
- Temple (75,000), Killeen (153,000), and Copperas Cove (37,000) are located close together, midway between Austin and Dallas. Fort Hood is in the same region; the military is the largest employer both for military and civilian jobs in Killeen and Copperas Cove. In Temple, the biggest economic sectors include health care, distribution, and some manufacturing and call center service. Killeen has a junior college that hosts a branch of Texas A&M, and Temple has a junior college and a medical school. Killeen has a bus system with connections to Temple and Copperas Cove, and Temple has an Amtrak station.
- Waco (138,000) is north of Killeen. The economy includes education, health care, manufacturing, and agribusiness. Higher education includes Baylor University and technical and junior colleges. Waco is home to one of the world's largest Masonic lodges. It has a bus system.
- Brownwood (19,000) is centrally located, a fairly long way from any large city. It has jobs in manufacturing, health care, education, and retail. There is a technical college campus and a Baptist college. Residents complain that the city government makes it difficult to start new businesses and that there's little to do; however, most like its conservative, small-town feeling.
- Sulphur Springs (16,000) is northeast of Dallas. Distribution, food processing, and manufacturing are among local employers. The town is home to a junior college, an award-winning farmers' market, a dairy museum, and a heritage park featuring historical buildings and artisanal demonstrations. Tourist attractions include two all-glass public restrooms on the square (one-way glass!). Townsfolk love the community

activities, low crime, and reasonable housing costs. There is Greyhound service.

- Texarkana (37,000) at the northeast corner of the state is part of a metro area with Texarkana, Arkansas (see above under that state). The military, health care, manufacturing (paper products and tires), and education are major employers. There is a Texas A&M branch and a community college. Texarkana is home to a federal prison and the American Baptist Association. It has a bus system and an Amtrak stop.
- Sherman (42,000) is located at the eastern side of the state's northern border. It has a good range of manufacturing employers as well as food and meat processing, distribution, education, and government. There is a community college branch campus and a dial-a-ride paratransit service.
- Wichita Falls (over 100,000) is farther west along the border. A large Air Force base is nearby, and the military is the largest employer. Others include education, health care, retail, manufacturing, and a men's prison. Wichita Falls is home to Midwestern State University, a public liberal arts school, and has a community college branch campus. It now houses the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame. The city has a fairly good local bus service, and has Greyhound service.

West Virginia

As for Kentucky, West Virginia seems to have more of Appalachia's chronic problems than Tennessee and fewer opportunities. It is much more rural in character, which for some will be attractive as there is still plenty of unspoiled scenery, and dominated by evangelicals, who make up over half the population. Addiction and poverty are common, and crime rates are often quite high compared to towns of similar size elsewhere. The coal industry is politically very powerful, enabling it to harm environments and human health almost unchecked, even though employment in that industry has been declining for decades.

In other communities, town water has been polluted by powerful chemical industries, including DuPont and Freedom Industries,

which in 2014 spilled toxins into the river that provides water to the largest metro area. West Virginia is known for its terrible water quality, with a majority of residents, disproportionately non-white and lower-income residents, exposed within a three-year period to water that does not meet standards (Allen and Patterson 2019). Some people who like deregulation in theory may not be eager to drink the results; if that's you, be careful to investigate before moving.

There are about 14 cities or towns having populations between ca. 10,000 and 48,000. Most communities in West Virginia have been losing population over the past 10 years. The state is making efforts to attract remote workers, but many areas have poor or near-absent internet service. If you will be looking for any kind of technical job, you're better off looking in Tennessee. You certainly shouldn't move to a small town unless you come from the area or are a blood relative of long-time residents.

All that said, one doesn't like to completely write this state off. It is poor and mostly rural. However, if you believe that the long-term future of this country is poor and mostly rural, maybe West Virginia would appear not so bad off: they have not so far to fall as most of us. With the exception of one metro region with a moderately larger footprint, Kurtz et al. (2020) estimated that their towns could be supplied from foodsheds under 250 km in radius if (as usual) less meat were eaten. Most promising places for outsiders include the following.

- Charleston, the biggest city, only has 49,000 people, although its metropolitan area includes about 200,000. Health care, retail, trade, energy, telecommunications, manufacturing, and chemical and extractive industries are among major employers. In 2014, "Freedom Industries" spilled toxic coal-processing chemicals into Elk River, which supplies the city's drinking water. There are a few university and college branch campuses in the metro area, and a variety of cultural events. Economic stagnation, drugs, and crime are issues. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Morgantown (30,000 people) is a college town, home of West Virginia University, whose student population is similar in size

to that of the town. Housing is a little pricier than in some places as a result, but not exorbitant by urban standards. In addition to the university, there's a large WVU hospital system and employment in retail, energy, and pharmaceuticals. The town is well liked for its beautiful scenery and low crime rate. There is both a bus system and a Personal Rapid Transit system, mostly serving WVU, which shuttles passengers among five stops in driverless electric mini-trolleys.

- Fairmont (18,000 people) is a somewhat rundown Rust Belt town, formerly mining-dependent, known as the Pepperoni Roll Capital of the World. There is a small public university, and Fairmont is home to the National White Collar Crime Center. Residents complain about drugs, but the crime rate is still pretty low.
- Wheeling (27,000 people), in the northern tail of the state, is less than 50 miles from Pittsburgh, PA, which some might see as a plus. Schools are good, housing cheap, and crime low. The economy includes energy, tourism, law, and health care, but many residents are employed in retail or services. There are four small colleges or universities. Entertainments include theater, a symphony, a waterfront with many live events, and a casino and greyhound racetrack.
- Bridgeport (9000 people) is a small bedroom community with limited jobs and rather high housing costs. It is the home of a large shopping complex. Bridgeport is well rated for its beautiful parks, good schools, and low crime; it is extremely white and religion may be found in public institutions.

There's a fair amount of transit access in western West Virginia, but none in the rural eastern part of the state (Hohmann 2019). Charleston, Parkersburg, Morgantown, Clarksburg, Fairmont, Bluefield, and Wheeling have Greyhound bus stops, as do half a dozen other less promising communities.

Chapter 9: A Few Words on Weird States

Here I discuss Indiana, North Carolina, and Virginia. These states are in iffy places politically or culturally, for different reasons, and the existing populations of the latter two may be crowding the boundaries of sustainability. Use caution in considering these as destinations, unless for some reason (family, job offer) they are your only choice.

If you truly can't endure a real winter, and would prefer to spend your last years in a secular democratic nation but are willing to live with a risk that you won't, Virginia and possibly North Carolina are your only real choices. Georgia (see Chapter 8), increasingly diverse and moderate but geographically and culturally embedded in the Southeast, has an uncertain future and has few appealing destinations; it is better avoided by migrants from outside the region, whatever their faction.

Geographically, you'd expect Ohio and Indiana to group with Pennsylvania and Illinois and become part of a revived northeastern industrial manufacturing center, but this is hardly a safe bet in the Red vs. Blue era, especially for Indiana. Contrarily, assuming that they would join the Confederacy might not be a safe bet either, especially for Ohio (see Chapter 7). I would not advise that supporters of secular democracy migrate to Indiana from other states, or that supporters of Christian nationalism migrate to Ohio. Migration within both states could certainly be beneficial to people who are already living in their large metropolitan areas.

Indiana

Indiana could support its urban areas easily if, as usual, people ate less meat (Kurtz et al. 2020). It has a historic industrial base in the north and good farmland downstate, and the population density is not

excessive. This state could easily make room for more migrants; the only uncertainty is political. The GOP holds a supermajority in both branches of the legislature due to both the state's conservative, rural character and its rather extreme gerrymandering, recently claimed to be worse than 95% of U.S. states (Stacey 2021). The legislative districts to be used from 2022 onwards not only "crack" parts of Indianapolis into irrelevancy, but similarly break up Fort Wayne, Lafayette, and Evansville (Menge 2021). During 2021, the legislature and the Trump-loyalist attorney general devoted time to taking exceptional action to strip the Republican governor of power to respond to the pandemic (Davies 2021).

Migrants who hope to live in a secular democracy would be taking a serious risk by moving here, although it might be relatively easy to get across the border in a hurry if needed. They should be prepared to live under very conservative government, with economic life dominated by polluters and union-busters, and to face increasingly aggressive anti-LGBTQ and possibly anti-immigrant policies as soon as the federal courts will let the state get away with it. Younger female residents should be prepared to travel to another state if emergency reproductive health care is needed. At present, I doubt that Indiana is a good choice for most such people, although if this pre-breakup period lasts long enough that climate change forces many millions of migrants out of the Western or coastal regions, increasing population pressures in the bluer states may make Indiana appear more attractive as a more affordable destination with more available jobs.

Migrants who hope to end up in a Red theocracy would also be taking some risk. Despite its right-wing politics and "home of the KKK" status, Indiana never was culturally or economically a Southern state, and a state government that was really confident that "urban" residents remain a small minority wouldn't have to work so hard to gerrymander them out of political participation. Betting on Indiana to join the Confederacy might not pay off.

All that said, many Indiana communities have much to offer in terms of day-to-day quality of life. If you are one of the 43 remaining Americans who genuinely don't care about politics and don't expect

any of the culture-war issues to affect you personally, this state could be a fine destination.

Indiana is not as urbanized as some similar states; Indianapolis, by far the largest city, has a population of close to 900,000, out of a total state population of about 6.8 million. The broader metro area is about 2 million people, but still, that's less than a third of the state. The second-largest population center is the Rust Belt strip at the north edge of the state: East Chicago, Gary, Michigan City, and surroundings as an extension of the Chicago metro area, and farther east, South Bend and Elkhart. Much of that area has been devastated by the decline of the traditional manufacturing economy, plus historical and recent discrimination and malign neglect. (Gary is only 10% white. Do you suppose that affects what the state government does to boost its economy?)

Because of the gerrymandering issue, city folks already living in Indiana would be well advised to spread themselves out a bit more. They will still be outnumbered, but they won't be completely deprived of a potential voice in the legislature, like many urban neighborhoods are. There are quite a few moderately sized cities and smaller towns outside those metro areas. You'll want to avoid areas of permanently high unemployment and economic stress. Some of the more promising and more affordable cities are as follows:

- Fort Wayne in the northeast has over 260,000 people and a somewhat sprawly metro area, though not as bad as Indianapolis. The city is at the confluence of two rivers. The diverse economy includes manufacturing (including defense), distribution, transportation, and logistics, finance and insurance, professional services, health care, retail, and tourism. Despite the recent loss of some manufacturing, the city is overall in good shape, though poor neighborhoods are not doing so well. There are a variety of public and private university branch campuses, and two community college campuses. Fort Wayne has all the cultural institutions you'd expect, a well-regarded zoo, a library system that holds the nation's second-largest genealogy collection, and many public

events, including a Pride fest. The city is relatively bike-friendly and has Greyhound service.

- Kokomo (60,000 people) is north of Indianapolis. It's a manufacturing town, having longstanding problems with ground and water pollution; at present the auto parts industry is the biggest employer. There are state and community college branch campuses. Cultural institutions are quite limited, but there is a decent five-line trolley-themed bus service that is, exceptionally, free. Has Greyhound service.
- Lafayette (71,000 people) is northwest of Indianapolis, on the Wabash River across from West Lafayette, the home of Purdue University. There is also a community college. Purdue is the largest employer in Lafayette as well; other industries include manufacturing and agricultural processing. West Lafayette has more high-tech businesses inspired by the university. The two cities have a joint bus service, making commuting to Purdue more convenient. West Lafayette is not recommended here since rents and housing prices are far higher than in Lafayette. Lafayette has a good variety of cultural activities. There is an Amtrak station and Greyhound service.
- Bloomington (79,000 people) is south of Indianapolis. It's the home of Indiana University Bloomington, a large school, and a community college. The local economy has many jobs in technology, life sciences, the medical industry, and health care. The city is supportive of bicycling and is served by Greyhound.
- Columbus (51,000 people) is east of Bloomington. The economy emphasizes manufacturing, technology, and research, but there is also an unusual concentration of architectural business, and the city supports and displays many examples of modern architecture and public art. There are a few university branch campuses. Served by Hoosier Ride intercity buses.
- Evansville (almost 120,000 people) is an Ohio River port city on the southern border at the west end of the state. The diverse economy includes manufacturing, health care, energy, banking and finance, distribution and transport, retail, tourism (including a casino), and education. There is a state university,

a community college, and a new medical school campus. There are many historic neighborhoods, and many neighborhoods whose soil is contaminated by industrial lead and arsenic; cleanup is slow. Air quality is also reduced by several coal-burning power plants in the area, and the river and its fish are toxic. There are many cultural, sporting and recreational options, and the library system is rated as one of the best in the country. Evansville annually hosts a Drum Corps International competition. Has Greyhound bus service.

- Jeffersonville (63,000 people) is on the southern border, also on the Ohio River. It is connected to Louisville, Kentucky by a pedestrian and cycling bridge, and the riverfront is a popular recreational spot. Major industries include health care, finance, and a diverse array of small manufacturers; the U.S. Census Bureau has a large office. Intercity bus service is available in Louisville.

And here are examples of smaller towns with potential for some possible residents. For each, you can assume "jobs are limited" is part of the description. In many, non-whites, especially African-Americans, might feel uncomfortable if not unsafe.

- Warsaw (15,000 people) is in the north of the state. It's a pleasant, affordable, close-knit, largely Christian town with a significant Hispanic minority. There is a variety of manufacturing; the most notable economic sector is businesses manufacturing and supplying orthopedic devices. There's a community college branch campus. Has Hoosier Bus service.
- New Haven (16,000 people) is a suburb of Fort Wayne. Agriculture and agribusiness are important in the area, and there's some manufacturing. Homes are cheap and crime is low; some residents complain of corruption and limited services. Very white.
- Auburn (14,000 people) is north of Fort Wayne. It is extremely white, but for residents, it is friendly, safe, and cheap. It's

known for its classic-car festivals and auction, Duesenberg Museum, and well-attended fall fair.

- Huntington (17,000 people) is southwest of Fort Wayne. Extremely white and, reportedly, not friendly to those who aren't. Housing is still cheap, but rent is increasing; crime is very low. There's a Christian college and some nice restaurants.
- Logansport (18,000 people) is at the confluence of the Wabash and Eel Rivers. There are some jobs in agribusiness (a large pork packing plant that was not quick to protect workers from COVID), manufacturing, and health care, but the economy is not booming. The town is notably conservative; it has a meth problem, but most categories of crime are still very low. There is a community college, a performing arts center, and an arts association and festival.
- Frankfort (17,000 people) is northwest of Indianapolis. It's more diverse than some Indiana towns, with a few Mexican restaurants. Drugs are a problem, but most crime rates are still below average. There is a community college branch.
- Greenfield (24,000 people) is east of Indianapolis, not quite swallowed by the sprawl (yet). It's a little more expensive than most small towns. There are a variety of jobs in manufacturing and health care, but apparently many people commute half an hour to Indianapolis. Crime is low, but there's a heavy police presence and residents warn that minorities can expect harassment. Schools are good. Has Greyhound service.
- Greencastle (10,000 people) is west of Indianapolis. It's the home of DePauw University, a small but well-known private college, which offers public cultural events. Greenville has an attractive nature park and thriving downtown, with a farmers' market and a variety of local activities. There's little crime or traffic, and housing is affordable. There's a community college.
- Crawfordsville (16,000 people) is west of Indianapolis. It's the home of tiny, but well-reputed all-male Wabash College. Steel manufacturing and printing are among local industries. Crawfordsville is largely white, but with a meaningful Hispanic minority. Has an Amtrak stop.

- Shelbyville (20,000 people) is southeast of Indianapolis. It hosts a racetrack/casino business. Residents don't seem enthusiastic about the town, but don't indicate that it's horrific either; perhaps it's just "meh."
- Greensburg (12,000 people) is in the southeast. There is some manufacturing employment, primarily Delta Faucet Company and a large Honda plant. It's a pleasant little town with very low crime and not much to do. It used to be a sundown town and is still 95% white; it might not be equally pleasant for some people.
- Seymour (22,000 people) is in the southeast; it's the home of musician John Cougar Mellencamp. It's a rather rundown town with not much to do, but many residents like it well enough.
- Madison (12,000 people) is in the southeast on the Ohio River. It's an attractive older town with a large historic district, so there is some tourism. It's conservative and very white (though it was once a stop on the Underground Railroad). Madison hosts an annual powerboat regatta and festival and has a community-owned racing hydroplane.
- Jasper (16,000 people) is in the southwest. It's a pleasant, peaceful town with well-regarded schools and many professional residents; there's a good hospital and well-paying medical jobs. Other industries include furniture making and engine remanufacturing; there's a university branch campus. Houses are starting to get pricey, but apartments (though possibly not very nice) are often still reasonable. Jasper is described as largely white, conservative, and religious. It has a town arts council. Many residents are German-American, and the town holds an annual Strassenfest.
- Washington (13,000 people) is in the southwest. Employers include agribusiness and services; many people commute to jobs. There are a variety of small community events. The town has a modest Hispanic minority. Served by intercity Hoosier Ride.

There is a variety of intercity transit, including some county systems. Several charter or fixed-route bus companies operate in the state. Greyhound has fairly good service, though for some reason it doesn't serve most of the communities chosen for mention here, including some relatively large ones, nor does the regional Hoosier Ride service. I haven't investigated all the other options, but it seems likely that there are many smaller communities where you really need a car to get out of town.

North Carolina

North Carolina too has been aggressively gerrymandered, with a heavy, intentional racial component, and the legislature makes reducing the number as well as the effect of African-American votes one of its highest priorities (Daley 2021). You can presume that a legislature designed to deprive African-American urbanites of political influence will not be fully dedicated to ensuring that urbanites' needs are met as things go downhill. Moderate and liberal voters' working to spread themselves more thinly across the landscape could benefit them substantially, though unfortunately, there don't seem to be too many safe and affordable places for them to go.

Coastal communities will be threatened by flooding from sea level rise and increasingly severe hurricanes. Unlike states farther north, the big cities in North Carolina are largely well inland, which will serve the state well in future. Parts of the coast are marshy, and the coastal towns are few, small, and probably have economies that rely on the proximity of the ocean. The exception is Wilmington, a mostly low-lying city of over 120,000 on the southeast coast. Its county has had 19 natural disasters resulting from hurricanes in the past. I suggest to Wilmington residents who are not highly attached to that community that they consider moving inland for greater security.

Inland cities include Charlotte, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, Durham, and Fayetteville, as well as a dozen smaller cities and many more towns. The named cities' metro areas, counting suburbs, range from over half a million to over 2.5 million people. Both Day and Hall (2016) and Kurtz et al. (2020) suggest that their long-term sustainability may be questionable. In particular, Kurtz et al.

find that some metro regions in North Carolina would require fairly large foodsheds even with lower-meat diets, because of the limited amount of farmland in annual crops near those cities.

Additionally, as I keep noting, racial segregation and educated urbanites' self-segregation are what makes gerrymandering possible. Therefore, it would be better if urban residents could spread out into a larger number of smaller communities. For someone wanting to get out of the giant cities and their suburbs, here are a few smaller cities and towns, all of which have intercity bus service, that might have potential.

- Asheville in the west is a moderate-sized (95,000 people), prosperous city with a reputation for artsiness. Historically its residents have therefore been heavily targeted for disenfranchisement through gerrymandering, and it would have to grow quite a lot before it would be impossible to disenfranchise. Though it is relatively well-positioned, Day and Hall (2016) note that its economy is heavily dependent on luxury spending, namely tourism. Further, like many tourist destinations, the cost of living is well above the national average. It could be a good destination only for people who are confident of having an above-average income.
- Wilson (50,000 people) is less than an hour east of Raleigh, but with a little countryside between them. Major industries include pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, distribution, finance, and agriculture. It is the home of a liberal arts college, a community college, and the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf. Much of the city is a bit run-down, and the local hospital is limited. Has an Amtrak stop. Recently converted its fixed-route bus service to a dial-a-ride service in partnership with a "transportation-technology" megacorp.
- Hickory in the west has a population of 43,000. Manufacturing (fiberoptic cable, furniture, tape, mattress coils), server farms, and logistics, distribution, and transportation are among important industries. There are a community college, a few small schools or branch campuses, and a convention center.

There are several festivals, a good variety of arts and cultural organizations, and a motor speedway. It attracts many retirees, but the costs of living are still reasonable. Has a limited bus service encompassing three local towns.

- Morganton (16,000 people) is near Hickory, a relatively short drive from Asheville. It's a historic Appalachian town with reasonable housing costs and generally pleasant feeling, despite some political/cultural tensions. State government, manufacturing, and tourism to the beautiful nearby mountains are major employments. Morganton hosts the state school for the deaf, a residential STEM-focused high school, and a state mental institution; there is a community college. Unemployment as of this writing is over 8%, which would normally disqualify it. However, a recent report (Howard, 2022) that residents are developing co-op manufacturing of furniture and textiles is a very good sign: this is exactly the sort of thing towns positioned to engage in manufacturing ought to be doing to keep jobs in town and profits in workers' pockets.
- Salisbury (35,000 people) is in the northeastern fringe of the Charlotte metropolitan area. The textile and manufacturing industry has been in decline, but medicine, education, government, tourism, and a grocery chain have made up for some of the losses. It has two private Christian colleges, a seminary, and a community college. It has many historic districts; there are several vineyards in the area. Has a modest city bus service and an Amtrak stop.
- Monroe (35,000 people) is at the southeastern fringe of the Charlotte metro area. Aerospace, pharmaceuticals, other manufacturing, agriculture, and education are among major economic sectors. Monroe is known for its antique and flea markets. It has a rather horrific history of persecution of Black residents but seems to have improved.
- Lenoir (18,000 people) is in the Blue Ridge Mountains northeast of Hickory. Past closure of furniture factories badly affected the economy; unemployment is now low, but so are average wages (and, fortunately, cost of living). Health care

and education, and to a lesser extent nurseries and server farms, are important employers. Diversions include hiking, bicycling, and local wineries and breweries.

- Boone (19,000 people), in the Appalachian northwest, is a college town, home to the good-sized Appalachian State University, the largest employer. Boone is largely white, but the area is home to the historic Junaluska African-American community, which has a mostly Black Mennonite Brethren congregation. Popular local culture includes bluegrass music and Appalachian storytelling, and there is beautiful and historic scenery. Many retirees have moved to Boone, creating equity issues. Most townies are poor, but housing costs have been run up by well-to-do retirees and even modest apartments can cost well over $1000 a month. There is a free public bus available to the community as well as college students.
- Southern Pines is a town of 14,000 in the south-central Sandhills region that was founded as a health resort. There are many horse farms and golf courses in the area. The military and associated corporations are major employers, as well as manufacturing. There is a large community college, and the public schools are well-regarded. Several breweries and a growler fill station contribute to the downtown ambience. House prices have skyrocketed recently, but rent is still relatively reasonable. There is an Amtrak stop and a single, but fairly complicated, local bus route.
- Newton (13,000 people) is just south of Hickory, whose bus system connects to it. Like Hickory, it is home to a variety of industrial employers and has low costs of living. Public events include a well-attended annual folk art festival.
- Lincolnton (11,000 people) is northwest of Charlotte, in the metro area but with some less developed space between them. It appears that some residents work in Charlotte and use Lincolnton as a bedroom community. Housing is pricier than in some places, but still certainly cheaper than in Charlotte.
- Rockingham, a town of less than 9,000 at the southern edge of the state, has many people working in education,

manufacturing, and retail. There is a community college, which is building a business and IT school. There is not much excitement, but there is a drag racing strip.

Virginia

Virginia is now a bluish-purple state in terms of its people's preferences. Virginia has in the recent past had problems with racist gerrymandering so severe as to be limited by the U.S. Supreme Court, yet elects a good number of Democrats; as of this writing, it appears that the 2022 pro-GOP bias will be somewhat moderated. It was one of the original 13 U.S. states and is geographically adjacent to presumed Northeastern states, so if any of the former Confederate states were to look north following a breakup of the U.S., Virginia would be the most likely. That is the prediction of Stephen Marche (2022a). However, culturally it is primarily Southern and I would not bet on its future affiliations.

As for most of the northeastern coastal states, the largest cities in Virginia are on or near the coast. The largest population center is in the southeast, with major cities including Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Chesapeake, Hampton, and others all in close proximity. A second major population center is at the northeastern corner of the state abutting Washington, D.C., with largest cities including Arlington and Alexandria. The fourth-largest city, Richmond, is in the central-east, well inland.

Kurtz et al. (2020) considered the metro areas with the most problematic food supplies to be the northeastern D.C. megalopolis and, not the large concentration around Hampton and Norfolk, but western areas, apparently including the much smaller Roanoke and Lynchburg. The montane areas to the west of those cities must have much less agricultural productivity to offer than the flat plains near the coast. However, today's migrants who have reason to move to this state may be willing to settle for short-term sustainability.

All of the coastal cities will be threatened by hurricanes and sea-level rise, and those in the D.C. metro area might have difficulty with food supplies in future. It would be sensible for some residents of these metro areas to consider moving to points farther west. Those

who are not conservative and preferably white will want to avoid the very right-wing extreme west and northwest. Probably most migration should be within-state. Out-of-state migrants might want to avoid Virginia, given both its uncertain political future and its existing population pressures. Virginia has lower overall population density than Pennsylvania, Ohio, or Illinois, but when you take into consideration the future effects of climate change on coastal cities, the lower proportion of land suitable for farming, and the outrageous rents and property values in most communities, it seems to be already pretty well populated.

Richmond seems to be in a relatively good position, for people who strongly prefer big-city living. The population is well over 200,000, and there are over a million people in the larger metro area. Government, law, banking, biotech, and corporate headquarters are major employers. The city proper is majority-minority and has a broad variety of religious communities. There is a large public university, and the metro area hosts several private, community, and technical colleges. Arts, culture, and literature are well represented. In historical architecture, which is plentiful, the city is known for its use of locally made cast iron. There is an Amtrak stop. Despite the good job market, poverty remains high, though crime has decreased over time. Housing is more expensive than in smaller places, though not Beltway-level exorbitant, so working-class people might struggle. The large suburban city of North Chesterfield is a little more affordable, though not much more.

Most intrastate migrants should be seeking smaller communities. Many smaller towns in northern Virginia have skyrocketing populations and New York-like costs of living, probably because Beltway denizens who don’t mind long commutes have run up the property values. These are best avoided. A few small to medium-sized cities with potential include the following.

- Roanoke (100,000 people) is a blue island in a red sea, more diverse than many Virginia towns. It is the cheapest city in Virginia, increasing appeal for the working-class. The economy includes health care, manufacturing, distribution, government

services, retail, and insurance; at last report, unemployment is low. There's a community college. Cultural institutions include an opera, symphony, youth symphony program, and children's theatre. The bus service is unusually good-sized for the South, though weirdly organized around a single hub, and includes a connection to the smaller neighboring city of Salem. Roanoke is located on a river, and flooding can be a problem. There is an Amtrak stop.

- Vinton (8000 people) is just east of Roanoke. It's relatively affordable and has small-town charm that attracts some tourists, but drugs and crime are problems. Probably most residents who want better than retail/service jobs have to commute to Roanoke.
- Lynchburg (ca. 80,000 people) has several universities, including the infamous Liberty University, which is the city's largest employer, and a community college. Technology, pharmaceuticals, and other manufacturing are important. There are some arts. Residents describe it as a "Christian town." Well-paying jobs are limited and poverty is high; older neighborhoods are run-down and have high crime, but overall crime is still below average. Housing costs, at least, are reasonable. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Charlottesville, home of the "public Ivy" University of Virginia, has about 47,000 people. It offers many jobs in government, health care, and service. There is a diverse brewing industry and many cultural events. Housing costs are quite expensive and poverty rates high; you shouldn't move here unless you have a well-paying job waiting for you. It was the site of an infamous neo-Nazi march and residents warn that "Yankees" moving there may be treated poorly. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Harrisonburg (52,000 people) is located to the northwest of Charlottesville towards the border. Manufacturing, food processing, brewing, distribution, education, health care, and software are major employers. Arts and culture are a valued economic sector, and there are two universities, one good-sized.

There is an attractive historic downtown. There is a noticeable Hispanic minority and some broader diversity as a result of refugee resettlement. Homes are pricey compared to similar communities in some states, but affordable rents can still be found. Some residents complain about low wages and covert racism (but that seems to be an issue almost anywhere).

- Winchester (28,000 people) is in the extreme north of the state. Several federal agencies and manufacturing corporations have offices here. Health, education, and retail also employ many residents. Winchester is far enough from D.C. to be relatively affordable, but still has above average housing costs. It's reputed to have a close-knit small-town feel and attractive scenery.
- Staunton (26,000 people) is near the similarly sized, less appealing Waynesboro. Major employments are in health care, education, retail, and government; well-paying jobs may be limited. Staunton is home to the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind; it has several urban cultural amenities, including a reproduction of Shakespeare's original playhouse. The town is largely white, and until just a few years ago the public schools handed students over for "out of class" weekday Bible lessons. Has an Amtrak stop.
- Farmville in central Virginia has only 8000 people. It's home to the public Longwood University. It's reputed to be a quiet college town with not much to do, but beautiful scenery to enjoy. Unfortunately, rent is getting expensive and wages are not increasing to go along.
- Culpeper in the north is now over 19,000 people, its population having roughly doubled in 20 years. Industries include manufacturing, data centers, telecommunications, technology, materials, food processing, and handmade furniture. There's a lot of history, and a market for Civil War tourism. Housing costs are a bit high and poverty is a problem. So is racism; it's largely white and the county sheriff has engaged in virulent anti-BLM conspiracy-mongering. Has an Amtrak stop.

Portions of Virginia are served by Greyhound, with service outside the coastal area mostly in the central region, and the Virginia Breeze bus service, which has three routes, all serving to connect smaller communities to the D.C. metro area and/or Dulles Airport.

Chapter 10: Housing for the Decline

People leaving the climate red zones may have a great variety of economic circumstances. Some will own a home outright or with a mortgage—these areas being what they are, perhaps a very large mortgage—and may plan an elaborate move in which they get a new job, sell the old house, and simultaneously buy a new house. Others will be lucky to be able to afford a small apartment or rented mobile home, or will have to crash with someone they know at their destination until they can work for a while and build up a cash reserve. I'll make a few suggestions for people in each category, with a quick digression:

"Wait, mobile home?! Are you serious?!"

Yes indeed. Mobile homes (or "manufactured homes," if made after 1976, or "tornado magnets") are unfashionable objects of mockery in urban areas, but still popular as cheap housing in rural areas, and they can be rented as well as bought. Mobile home parks give each family a space with four walls and a little "yard," though usually residents are not allowed to use it for anything useful, such as gardening. Where land is cheap enough to make this arrangement affordable, residents often prefer it to apartments in which people are stacked on top of each other with less privacy.

Mobile homes can be inexpensive to rent or purchase, due to their relatively flimsy construction. Nationwide, average rent for a mobile home has increased sharply in the past 10 years, reaching $568 per month in 2020 (Statista, 2021b), still cheaper than most apartments. Higher figures may be expected in some places, though. Although numbers are not directly comparable, as apartments are mostly located in more urban, more costly areas, you might well find that mobile homes are cheaper than apartments in the same town.

Mobile homes' lightweight construction often means that heating bills are very high for their size, unless you can find ways to insulate the home or yourself or just grin and bear it all winter. They do not stand up well to tornadoes, so a park should have a community building that residents can use for shelter in severe weather. Many have their own water supply separate from the town's, so it's a good idea to check online (City-data has some information) for any recent major safety violations. Some have other potential environmental or financial/legal risks; the website of US Mobile Home Pros (2018) lists questions one might want to ask before signing a lease. Otherwise, renting a mobile home is much like renting an apartment. Some mobile home parks restrict or forbid pets, but in many towns it may be easier to find a park that will allow your dog or cat than an apartment or rented house.

Because mobile home parks are where the economically disadvantaged live in many smaller communities, you could have some neighbors with social or drug issues, just as you might in an affordable apartment complex in a city. But there are also many working-class families with children in good parks, which can have a real community spirit. Since parks are more densely populated than a neighborhood of homes on large lots, it can be easier for the kids to play together and the adults to socialize; you do not have to walk a long way to get together with neighbors. It is also easier for a kid to get outside, emotionally as well as physically, when they're in a mobile home rather than on the third floor. If a mobile home park is the best available first stop in your new home, don't let yourself be put off by urbanites' stereotypes.

If you currently own a house or condo in one of the red zones we've discussed, because of the population density in many of those areas it may have cost much more than similar housing in the middle of the country. If that means you have a big mortgage that will have to be paid off when you sell the house, especially if it's in a very high-risk place, I wouldn't recommend that you wait too long to do that. If people start deciding it's a bad place to move to as the negative headlines increase, it could be more difficult than you'd

expect to unload that house for what you paid for it—or what you still owe. If you own the house outright, at present you can sell it and walk away with enough money to buy a comparable house in a less crowded destination town, cover your relocation costs, and have money left over. This is the ideal circumstance to be in.

However, I recommend against buying as much house as you can afford, or even a house comparable to the one you had in California, unless that was a very modest house. Spacious housing for small families is a product of the fossil fuel era. In the past, people had much less square footage per capita, not only because building materials were expensive, but because heating a large place with wood would have been too costly. Small houses are cheaper to insulate, cheaper to heat and cool, cheaper to furnish, and easier to clean and maintain. Buy a house that's smaller than you could afford and spend leftover money on making it energy-efficient.

Avoid neighborhoods with a homeowner's association if at all possible. A very common purpose of HOAs is to allow persnickety, shallow people to force their neighbors to put on a show of being well-to-do conformists. Maybe you don't care now if someone dictates what color your mailbox or curtains are, but when times are tough and they're dishing out huge fines to people who put up a clothesline or grow a few useful plants, you'll find that they're a real threat to your well-being.

If you look around your current spacious house or apartment and think that you have more stuff than can be fit into a smaller place, give serious consideration to downsizing. How much furniture, electronic gizmos, entertainment supplies, kitchen gear, clothes, etc. would you have left if you got rid of everything that you rarely use now, wouldn't use in your new home either, and wouldn't much miss? You can sell those things, or donate them to support good causes and reduce the ultimate purchasers' need to buy new things. The less you have, the cheaper and less stressful your move will be.

If the average income in your new community is low, many people will live frugally by necessity, and the more old-fashioned types still see thrift as a virtue. It is a virtue: living below your means reduces your impact on the climate and readies you for a day when

your means may decline. If you are well-to-do, you don't have to feign poverty, but try not to arrive in a humble community with lots of fancy furniture and fancy clothes and a fancy car. In our money-loving consumer culture, many rural folks these days do practice conspicuous consumption, but it will be of a different type, e.g., an overly tricked-out pickup truck or giant bass boat. Your urban status-display items will not be admired so much as they will mark you as an outsider.

If you are young and have little savings, you will be looking for a town where it's possible to rent an apartment or mobile home. Too many Americans are compelled to accept housing that's more expensive than they can afford, keeping them from getting ahead by building up savings or taking classes. If your income potential is high enough that you can get housing that's *cheaper* than you can afford, grab that opportunity! Don't look for the biggest place you can afford, or the one with the most amenities. The smaller and less fancy you can live with, the better. Smaller means cheaper, and easier to heat.

Don't rent a furnished apartment if you can avoid it. They are more expensive, and rarely available in small towns. Bring basic furniture with you or get it when you can after you arrive. Professional movers are expensive, but if you're a younger couple, you can probably rent a truck and move your essential furniture and other belongings by yourselves. If you are single or unable to lift heavy things, perhaps you can get friends to help load a truck and arrange for paid labor at the other end to unload it. The more excess stuff you can get rid of before moving, the better; less stuff means a smaller, cheaper truck and less backbreaking work at both ends.

If you own very little stuff, it is rather easy to move. My husband and I moved twice, in our first year together, in a Ford Fairmont. A few years later that would have been impossible, because we owned a bunch of furniture. If money is really tight and you don't have any furniture that you're emotionally attached to, you could sell, donate, or abandon all or most of your furniture, move in your car or using a rental trailer or mini-truck, and acquire secondhand furniture in your

new home as you can manage it. In the right season, you could do the local yard-sale circuit to hunt for furniture; this would help you get to know the town, too.

If you have choices when you move, or if you're going to purchase a house, seek a neighborhood that is less likely to be affected by climate-enhanced natural disasters. Some disasters are unpredictable (tornadoes) or affect large areas (hurricanes). Others can be highly localized. Flooding is the biggest issue. We have been hearing over and over about places getting a year's worth of rain in a few days, or a 500-year flood. (In the future, those may be called *10*-year floods.) When I started writing this book, it had been Europe and China. Weeks later, it was Tennessee, where dozens of people were killed by flooding, some swept out of wrecked apartment buildings by the water, after *17 inches* of rain fell (Pilkington 2021). A hotter atmo-sphere can hold more water, so storms will be more intense and dump heavier rainfall. Areas that have usually had enough surface water will now, at times, have far more than enough. Think about where in your neighborhood that water might go.

As flood expert Prof. Bob Criss explained in an article on urban flooding in St. Louis (Gray 2021), small streams are a much bigger risk for destructive or deadly flooding after heavy rain than big rivers. The river already has a huge amount of water flow, and people building near its banks realize that the flow varies greatly by season, so usually there are either protective walls and dikes, or open spaces where extra water can spread out. A small creek cannot contain a huge influx of water from the monsoon-like rains that will become increasingly common with climate change, and it can rise ten feet or more and spill far over its banks in a matter of hours. This is *especially* the case if the creek has been engineered into a straight drainage canal with concrete sides, where there is nothing to slow the water down and nowhere for it to go except over the edge and into the streets.

Humans naturally prefer to live near water, even in times when we don't have to carry our household water in buckets from a water source. But you don't want to live too near water that is likely at

some point to rise and flood your neighborhood. Check a map when you're looking for a home; if there's a creek anywhere nearby, check it out. Is it concretized? Does it have undeveloped floodplain space around it? If it looks risky, try to make sure that the main floor of your dwelling would be at least a few yards above it in elevation. Horizontal distance won't do much good, because if the stream flow suddenly increases by up to 5000 times the usual, which can happen (Gray 2021), and the area around the stream is flat, and especially if it is paved, that water can spread out for hundreds of yards.

If economic limitations force you to rent an apartment near a risky stream, apartments on the second floor or higher are physically safer. If you live anywhere in a flood-prone area, don't store anything irreplaceable in a basement. (On the other hand, access to a basement during a heat wave can literally be lifesaving.) Of course, if you're buying a house, look for any evidence that it's been flooded before. If the basement has been full of water or worse before, it probably will be again.

Another desirable feature is the ability to grow a bit of your own food. If your family would have the ability to manage a garden, look for a house with a suitable yard with adequate sunlight. Many towns still prohibit growing useful plants in the front yard; check this out and make sure that if the town has that attitude, you only look for a good back yard.

If you don't have time or strength for much gardening, look for a small yard that won't demand much maintenance. Don't buy a house with a big lawn that you couldn't mow with a hand push mower if need be. Some local governments may require you to keep it mowed even in an energy crisis. Or look for an apartment, mobile home in a park with small lots, or in larger cities, perhaps a condo.

If you must get an apartment, try to find a place where you would be able at least to grow a few potted vegetables on a balcony or patio, or where there would be a nearby community garden where you might get a small patch. Nobody who lives in a town can grow most or all of their own food, but you won't need to. Up until quite recently, you could buy enough lentils, rice and oatmeal to keep yourself

from starving for a dollar a day. If staple food costs tripled, most people who have cooking facilities could still manage $3 a day. But it wouldn't provide adequate nutrition for long without the addition of some fruits and vegetables, and being able to supply a little of that yourself would add resilience to your life. (In the longer term you'd also need some animal products or vitamin supplements. Try to make friends who keep chickens.)

Another thing that people moving northeast may need to think about is the nature of their winter heating fuel. Electric heating is common in the south. In colder climates, though newer electrical systems can work well, natural gas is the most commonly used fuel. In New England, fuel oil or kerosene is also used, especially in rural areas. Natural gas is delivered through pipes in most towns, but fuel oil has to be trucked in and dumped into a tank on the property. Be sure you find out when you're acquiring housing what sort of furnace or heating system you'll have and what you'll need to do to keep it running, if it's something you're not familiar with.

Natural gas is currently the most plentiful and cheap fossil fuel for home heating, but eventually it too will become more expensive and less available. In the long run, houses will have to be heated by other means, such as renewable wood heating, geothermal energy, or Passivhaus technology that insulates the place so well (without suffocating the inhabitants!) that hardly any fuel must be burned. At present, only a tiny fraction of homes are heated by non-fossil alternatives. If you will own your house and can afford to install a wood stove as a backup to your furnace, or even a geothermal system, by all means do so. If you can't, keep it in mind for the future. And do also look into approaches to heating yourself and your immediate workspace rather than the whole house, as well as ensuring that the house is well insulated if at all possible.

If you are like the vast majority of Americans, you have a car or other passenger vehicle. If you're middle-class, you aren't likely to be giving it up voluntarily. If you're young or poor, you may be using it as your moving van. In the long run, though, you'd be wise

to reduce your car dependency as much as possible. Cars are helping to change the climate. They are costly to feed, repair, insure, and occasionally replace, so the time may come when you can't afford to keep a car.

Also, someday you might be unable to get gas, the right type of oil, or some necessary part for weeks or months. This is another one of those things that is *already happening now*, with ongoing COVID-triggered supply chain and shipping disruptions. People are complaining online about cars in need of repair being unusable for weeks or longer because a required part is back-ordered. Remember the predictions of the Limits to Growth team, that the production of consumer goods per person might plummet over the next couple of decades. In a globalized economy that would certainly mean many more shortages, of more items, and longer ones. Unsocial behaviors like starting a civil war or defaulting on the national debt would also create a rapid reduction in accessible goods.

To that end, when you move, if you know where you will probably be working, try to get housing close enough to that area that you could walk there and back daily if needed. A location gets bonus points if there's any kind of grocery store or farmer's market within an easy walking distance and if the school your kids would attend is within walking or cycling distance. In a city that's too big to walk across, if you can't live near work or can't predict where you'll be working, look for housing that's within *easy* walking distance of a bus stop, if there are buses, and a grocery store.

For able-bodied people, walking distance doesn't mean "within three blocks." In the 1970s my middle-class father walked two and a half miles each way to work and back most days, including in Illinois winters, unless there was ice or really heavy snow. We had one car in a two-parent family. That was considered normal. I walked half a mile each way to school, again in most kinds of weather, from kindergarten through fourth grade. That didn't kill kids; it was *good* for them. If you're young today, the chances that you will be able to drive everywhere you go when you're elderly are slim. Start getting used to getting around on foot and with the aid of public transport, and you'll be doing yourself a huge favor—doubly so if you move to

a less car-centric place where walking in good weather will actually be pleasant.

Speaking of cars, consider whether your current car is a good vehicle for the place you'll be going. There's a reason rural people like pickup trucks. Most of my readers who actually decide to lead the next Great Migration will be moving from warm places to colder places. Some cars do not perform well in winter weather or on poor roads, which will become increasingly common in the de-industrial future. If you have one of those zippy sports cars with 2" of road clearance, not only will it have trouble handling heavy snow or potholed or gravel roads, but it's likely to accumulate a lot of road salt on the bottom and rust out fast. Sell it before moving if you can, and buy something more suitable for the climate.

If you have an unusual brand or type of car, especially imported, and you've decided to move to a smaller town, try to investigate local businesses and make sure there's a mechanic locally who would work on it. These days you can get a Honda worked on almost everywhere, but I'd worry about weirder foreign cars, or electric cars, which in addition to being a political signifier are dependent upon very costly batteries. (And unless your local electricity is all renewable, they probably don't actually save that much carbon.) It could be better to trade such vehicles in on something locally more popular before you go. If you can't sell an inappropriate vehicle, get used to the idea that you won't be able to keep it running forever. Cars embody a huge amount of resources in their production, so from now on, for the rest of your life, buy used cars even if you could afford new, drive them sparingly, and keep them running as long as possible with gentle treatment and regular attention to low-cost maintenance.

Chapter 11: Advice for the Broke

According to a survey conducted by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (2019), 39% of Americans do not have enough savings to pay for an unexpected $400 expense without hardship, such as having to borrow money or failing to pay regular bills. The implication is that *most* Americans do not have the savings needed to move safely from one formal, legal housing situation into another, unless a new employer agrees to cover the costs. It costs far more than $400 to do that, especially long-distance, especially with a family.

To get a lease you usually need three months' rent (first, last, damage deposit—and you won't get your last damage deposit back in a hurry, if at all). If you can find an apartment or mobile home for only $500 a month, extremely cheap these days, that's $1500 upfront. Utilities, which are usually mandatory, may require deposits. Cheaper informal rental arrangements, such as renting a room in a private house, may be hard for strangers from another state to obtain. There will be transportation costs: truck rental fees, gas, and possibly payment for someone to help you pack and unpack it. At minimum you'll need gas for a heavily loaded car, or in the real worst-case scenario, bus fare. If you are moving without a job offer in hand (a high-risk gamble in a smaller town or depressed city!), you had better have enough additional savings to pay for at least the first month's costs of living. All told, a few thousand dollars is the minimum most people need, if not more. The result is that many people are trapped in abusive labor markets because they aren't paid enough to amass the needed savings to escape.

Single-room occupancy housing in larger cities used to provide many low-income workers with cheap rooms, especially suitable for single men. Unfortunately, for decades there's been a concerted

campaign to wipe it off the map in America and replace it with larger, more expensive apartments that provide nicer ambience and more profit. If you can find SRO housing or an affordable by-the-week "hotel" in a destination town you're willing to consider, that's a resource you might take advantage of to allow you to be housed on arrival without spending a fortune. Of course, the neighborhood and some of the clientele will not be the finest; be sure you can tolerate that.

Another solution for some, if you are eager to move but have little savings, is to ask someone in the region of interest for help. Do you have a relative or old friend in a possible destination city or town who might be willing to let you stay with them for a while? Ask, and offer sincerely to make it worth their while by helping with housework or child-minding, chipping in rent or grocery money once you get work, etc. Be sure you're fully prepared to follow through if they agree.

I *don't* suggest the fashionable "vandwelling" option because it is my impression that people who live in vans almost always spend at least several thousand dollars to buy and fix up their vans, to say nothing of gas and insurance. A person who is truly broke can't do it, unless perhaps they have valuables that they can sell. If your plan for long-term security is to move somewhere, get a job or otherwise earn a regular living, and become a permanent part of a community, you won't blow the money that would have fully paid for a bare-bones move on a vehicle that will give you an uncomfortable, risky, precarious life outside a permanent community. (Many police departments persecute identified nomads, and it can be hard to get work. Vandwellers seem to be most tolerated in the wide open spaces out West—exactly where you are, perhaps, trying to get away from. And people who live in vehicles are uniquely vulnerable to having their entire lives and all their belongings stolen in one go.)

If you can't afford to move even to modest housing and have nobody who can offer you a shelter, unless you have a work/life situation that will truly *never* allow you to get ahead where you are, it's wisest to stay put for now and devote yourself to amassing savings for a move. As liberal commentators have pointed out

repeatedly (e.g., Ehrenreich 2014), "it's expensive to be poor." If you move without enough money to rent an apartment and turn on utilities, you'll likely be stuck in a motel. The higher costs of that housing, plus the processed food you'll have to buy if you can't get away with cooking in the room, will guarantee that unless your wages are quite generous, you will *never* save up the money to rent an apartment. At best, you'll go on paying those gougey costs for that inferior, unhealthful lifestyle indefinitely. More likely, you'll someday have a minor financial setback (car breakdown, week of work lost to illness) and be thrown out on the street.

Some of the families that have too little savings to move actually have middle-class incomes or at least a living wage, but their expenses are so high that every paycheck is fully spoken for. If that's you, figure out where your money is going and cast a hard eye on each category, from food and transportation to clothes, makeup, or entertainment. If you or your family decided to tighten your belts and make sacrifices for a year to support your long-term goals, how much money could you save? Here are some money-raising options for people in this category to consider:

- If you're young and don't have a lot of stuff to wrangle, do you have any relatives in your current area who might let you move in with them for a year and pay a low rent while you build your savings? You don't want to move back in with a parent who is actually abusive to you or your partner, if any, or might start thinking *your* kid was *theirs* now. However, a parent who is just a demanding pain in the ass or constant Fox News viewer could be tolerable for a finite period if you knew you could come away with several thousand dollars in savings and be ready to move.
- Spend a couple of weeks figuring out how much you spend per week on food and beverages (whether coffee, beer, or soda pop). With home cooking and few luxuries, you can eat nutritious food with some variety for $4 a day per person (Brown 2014)— in 2022 it might be safer to say $5, or $35 a week. See Brown (2014) for a free e-book of how-tos. How much could you save by sticking to that for a year?

- If you have any kind of cable or satellite TV, quit that as fast as you can and stash the money. Almost every community in America has more than enough boob tube available free over the air. In a year's time you'd have enough to pay for a month's rent in a cheap town, if not two months.
- Cut back on air conditioning or heating. Paul Wheaton (2011) offers a detailed online explanation of how he slashed his electric heating bill 87% (in Montana!) by dressing warmly, turning the temperature down to what would normally be painfully low, and using a few spot-heating gadgets to compensate. In winter, clever use of hot water bottles can make lower temperatures tolerable (De Decker 2022). In summer, using an electric fan or just putting a damp bandanna around your neck can make a hotter temperature tolerable.
- You may really need a cell phone to work, but not the highest data level so you can watch streaming video. Your 10-year-old does *not* really need a cell phone, and you don't really need for him or her to have one (they exist because all of their grandparents, who didn't have cell phones in childhood, didn't die). You certainly don't need any paid online entertainment services, such as streaming TV.
- If child care is crushing your budget, see if you can find a cheaper option, such as informal care from someone you trust—understanding that this is very difficult for workers who aren't allowed advance notice of their work schedules. (Two words: Union Ize.) Might your kid be old enough to be left alone after school? If there are two or more adults in your family, read what I have to say about the domestic economy in the next chapter. Might you have more money left over each month if the lowest-paid adult quit their job?
- Are you spending a lot of money on extracurricular activities for your children, or private lessons in music, sports, etc.? If so, does your child really love the subject or show special talent for it? If he's grudgingly practicing the piano 20 minutes a day when you force him to, he's not going to be the next Scott Joplin anyway; give him a break and save the money.

- Do you use any recreational drugs, including cigarettes or vaping? I won't tell you to quit cold turkey, but try to nudge your consumption just a little bit lower each week, every week—get a little notebook and keep track—and record and stash the savings when they start to appear.
- Beneficial medical care is high-priority, but not all care is beneficial. Are you on any pricey pharma drugs that you might have needed at one point? Ask your doctor hard questions about whether that really means you need them forever. (Many drugs cause severely damaging or life-threatening withdrawal syndromes when stopped abruptly, so never do that without investigating what might happen to you.) Are you quick to rush your kids to the ER or urgent care for a mildly bumped head or sore throat? Has it saved their lives yet? You can ask yourself whether the next round you might be about to embark upon really seems necessary. The hospital or your insurance company, if you have one, might have a nurse hotline you can call for reassurance.
- Same goes for complementary care. Short-term therapy like Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy can be life-changing, but if you've been seeing a therapist for several years and feel less happy or less emotionally competent than when you started, question the value. If you take expensive nutritional supplements for no more specific reason than a general wish to ensure continued good health, calculate how much you might save if you cut back to a grocery-store vitamin pill for a year or two.
- Does your family have more than one car? If you've got more than one driver, it would certainly be an inconvenience to cut back to one car, but not always a calamity, depending upon your family circumstances. Think about whether it could be managed in a money-saving way.
- Every $10-a-month expense you can cut is $120 in a year's time. That might not seem like much, but if you could find five such little expenses to cut, and were able to sock away all of the

savings, you'd end up ahead $600; in some places that could be a month's rent.

- If you have friends who refuse to do anything with you that doesn't cost you a lot of money, this is a fine time to start distancing yourself from them. You hope to move away and leave them soon, after all, and spendthrift types aren't likely to be worried enough about the future to follow in your footsteps.
- If you have student loan, credit card or medical debts that you have no hope of paying off for years to come no matter what you do, consult a credit counselor. I'm no expert, but if it were me, I wouldn't pour all my savings from economizing into reducing the loan balance a little faster at the expense of building my savings to meet an emergency need—or to move before my life was turned upside down by a regional calamity. You can ask a credit counselor whether you should declare bankruptcy—but beware, many landlords think that someone who has done so does not deserve to live under a roof for several years afterwards.
- On the other hand, if you have small credit card debts, or other small debts at predatory interest rates, that you could rapidly pay off by tightening your belt, doing that first then stashing the money that was formerly gouged out of you every month as interest might let you accumulate more total savings in the medium term.
- Do you recognize that you have more stuff than you need? Some of it must have at least a little resale value. Take as much as possible to shops that buy used books, video games, sporting equipment, jewelry, etc., then hold a yard or "moving" sale. Save every dime. As a bonus, the more stuff you get rid of, the less you'll have to pay to move.

Unfortunately, many Americans are paid so little, and their working conditions are deliberately structured to keep them so vulnerable, that they *can't* ever hope to save thousands of dollars. Entry-level women's jobs in particular, as Barbara Ehrenreich (2014) explained, "are a trap: They pay so little that you cannot accumulate even a

couple of hundred dollars to help you make the transition to a better-paying job. They typically give you no control over your work schedule, making it impossible to arrange for child care or take a second job." And, often, they wreck your body too.

Some people who know that they really can't get ahead where they are do move with nothing, in the hope of finding something better in a place that's cheaper or has more jobs. They may live in their car for months if they have to, or camp out of their car. Sometimes that's the best choice—or, for people like climate refugees, the only choice. But, as you will well know if you're poor, it's not easy or safe, especially if you have kids or pets.

I wouldn't presume to advise people in such a terrible situation, except to say that it's almost always better to have a safety net. If you have family or close friends who would make sacrifices to keep you from starving on the street, you're better off living where they live, even if the location is a bad bet in the long run. Exploited working mothers might band together for mutual support, though many zoning codes are written to make that difficult by restricting shared housing, which keeps workers isolated and maximizes landlords' and nurseries' income.

If there's no person who would go far out of their way to help you, then you're better off in a community where there are social services that will help the needy, instead of just taking their kids away then pushing them out into the gutter. Perhaps that's your current community, or perhaps it's someplace else. Best of luck to you.

Chapter 12: Education, Employment, and Putting Food on the Table

Perhaps you're middle-aged and have a job, profession, or independent business by which you're making a decent living. Unless you've come to hate that career, you'll likely want to stick with it for the rest of your working life, if possible. But do take some time to think about how it fits into the framework of complexification—and possible decomplexification. How essential is your work, really?

You don't need to ask that question in so radical a way as to assume that every job other than "peasant farmer" is non-essential. Barring a major nuclear war, for the rest of your life there will be large, complex economies. Any job or business that was common in 1950 and is still common today will likely exist in 2050. Some new job categories will remain popular because there is now widespread need for them. For example, with everyone using computers, we need a lot of computer repair techs and nerds who can help us get our software installed; computer manufacture may be having problems, but we aren't going to stop using the ones that exist anytime soon.

However, if your job isn't directly producing a good or providing a service, but doing paperwork that's supposed to help others to do so, be honest with yourself about how essential that help is. Plenty of those less-essential positions within a company do real good for the company or its employees—saying your job isn't utterly necessary isn't saying it's useless—but still could be among early cuts if the budget tightens. Anyone who's worked in a larger business or nonprofit where the number of administrative assistants has ratcheted downwards over the years, requiring other staff to take over their tasks using automated systems, knows what I mean. Government services will be reduced based on political considerations rather than value (the police will be fully funded; teachers and public health

officers, not so much). If your job involves the provision of "luxury" goods or services, not necessarily meaning furs and diamonds but just things that most Americans can't afford, bet that fewer will be able to afford them in future. (The exception will be businesses catering entirely to the super-rich, so long as they retain their current political dominance that will enable them to consume ever-greater slices of a shrinking pie, but you don't want to be standing next to them when they lose it.)

You also don't need to immediately abandon a good livelihood because you can predict that fewer people will be employed in it decades from now. Some large-scale changes will occur through attrition, as people now doing those jobs retire and are not replaced, so young people take other types of work. However, if you acknowledge that your work is, at best, "nice but not necessary," you might want to think about what your Plan B might look like. The younger you are, the more important that is. More on that below.

If you have a specialized skill that can't be used just anyplace, you'll need to live in the kind of place where it can be practiced. That may not mean a big city, though. Perhaps your current job would be hard to duplicate in a small town, but some have businesses or cultural institutions that employ people to do something similar. The small-town equivalent would be lower-paid, but your costs of living could be so much lower and your quality of life so much higher that it would be well worth the decline in status as traditionally defined. Some people could make ends meet as independent businesspeople. Keep an open mind.

If your current employment *doesn't* provide a living wage or treat you with respect, especially if it's dubiously sustainable—service work catering for mass air travel, let's say—it's never too early to start looking for ways to move into a new field or learn a new skill. If you're 20 and not yet sure what to do with your life, consider, as you are deciding, that you will probably live long enough to see a *lot* of ecological and economic decline. If there's a specific thing you desperately want to do and have the talent for, then by all means pursue it, understanding that if you're unlucky you could wind up doing low-wage labor to survive for the rest of your life. Otherwise,

be strategic. The purpose of work is to keep you fed and housed. Any work that does that without ruining your physical, mental or moral health can be tolerable. It's nice if you love your job, but if you don't, you can spend your leisure time on things that have more personal meaning.

Under present circumstances, most Americans are employed or semi-employed by corporations, and those corporations are always seeking to save money by replacing employees with robots or foreign sweatshop labor. Even radiologists are finding their jobs outsourced, as hospitals find it cheaper to send X-ray images digitally to be read by radiologists in India. On the assumption that this trend will go on for a while longer, it's wise to think about positioning yourself to compete for good jobs that are hard to outsource to other continents or turn over to robots. Contrarily, if America were to descend into outright civil war, foreign sweatshops would be increasingly unwilling to accept possibly worthless U.S. dollars, forcing rapid "insourcing"; however, since at that point 99% of us would be broke, many sectors of the peacetime economy would be virtually abandoned. Jobs that are hardest to outsource or automate are frequently those that require a physical presence and the use of hands and a brain.

Not *everyone should go to college!*

Let's take a moment to ponder the social and emotional meaning of college education in America. One of the most unrealistic left-wing ideas for the future economy is "*Everyone should go to college.*" Everyone should get a four-year degree, then everyone will get a nice well-paying job, and we all live happily ever after. This is certainly better-intentioned nonsense than the opposing idea, "Nobody should go to college because they might learn that Jim Crow was bad," but it's still nonsense. First, not everyone *could* get a college degree; in addition to lack of money, lack of access, or lack of adequate preparation or interest, there's such a thing as lack of talent. Unless you're prepared to say that people who can't make it through college don't deserve basic security or health care, making

college universally available would not be sufficient to create a decent or humane society.

Second, there are not enough good jobs that require college degrees to employ the whole population, and there are plenty of jobs that don't or shouldn't require degrees that are essential to a functioning society, so somebody will need to do them. Imagine for a moment that every kid in America had the talent, drive, and opportunity to earn a PhD in physics. We would soon know everything that it was possible to know about physics-related subjects; that would be nice. But though there would be a great many jobs for physics teachers and professors in that world, there would not be enough for all those new PhD graduates to be so employed. Most would be forced to take other kinds of available work, and some would, inevitably, wind up stocking shelves and mopping floors at the local Safeway. They might look back on grad school with nostalgia, or more likely with regret and resentment that they wasted years of their lives and incurred financial losses to get an education they then couldn't use. Therefore, the "send everyone to college" goal is not an adequate substitute for the need to create a system in which lower-wage workers have secure access to food, shelter, and health care. No matter how educated we all might become, somebody, always, will have to work the "lower-skilled" jobs.

America doesn't like to talk about social class, but we have profound class divides. Except for a brief period of high union membership (largely for white males), the working classes have generally gotten barely a large enough slice of the pie to live on. Real wages have stagnated for decades, while the socially expected expenses have increased. The middle and upper-middle classes have been doing much better, although everyone's income is suppressed by the increasing proportion of national GDP diverted to make the super-rich even super-richer. Middle-class parents are terrified by the thought that their kids might slip out of the middle class, not because they are snobs (though some are), but because they don't want those kids to wind up too poor to visit a dentist or dream of buying a home. Working-class kids see college as their leg up. Almost all view the

diploma as a talisman that will guarantee continued membership in, or entry into, the middle class.

Unfortunately, this is no longer always true. It used to be that a college degree, in any subject, really was a ticket to a white-collar job or managerial rank. It no longer is, because there are now more young people recently graduated from college than there are available white-collar jobs, so not all can get hired for the jobs they envisioned. Employers are free to be more selective: now only a business degree will do, say, or a degree from a selective school, or a master's instead of just a bachelor's degree. We won't even talk about the fact that many corporate HR departments use biased algorithms to screen job applications. Those who don't make the cut may end up pouring coffees or driving for Uber.

Back even longer ago, when few people except rich young white men went to college, corporate employers actually had to *train* the workers they wanted, instead of having them pay for their own training. Employers will say that high school graduates these days do not have the same level of basic skills as they did several decades ago, and there's some truth to that. It is also true, though, that employers are requiring applicants for most decently paying jobs to demonstrate that they have already acquired some technical skills and experience at their own expense, usually with no real means of knowing in advance that they will be rewarded with a salary that lets them pay off the loans incurred. Finishing a college degree is often one of the hoops to jump through, not because it is the only possible way to learn essential skills, but because it demonstrates things about the candidate: persistence, diligence, ability to follow orders . . . and probably some level of financial security in their family background.

Some degrees are still in great demand, especially those in difficult or boring quantitative subjects, but subjects perceived as easier or more interesting or emotionally meaningful appeal to more students. (Would you rather read accounting textbooks or American literature?) That creates a surplus of graduates in those fields, especially as hiring fashions change. One of my loved ones once worked as a habilitation aide in a home for severely disabled children, comparable to a nurse's aide with a very low hourly wage, with a

coworker who had a master's degree in Russian history. That was right after the Soviet Union collapsed.

For that matter, even PhDs in hard sciences are now so plentiful that many go through multiple short-term postdoc positions before getting jobs as adjunct instructors at universities, paid a few thousand dollars a course with no job security or, for the part-time, benefits. If there were fewer PhDs than available teaching positions, colleges would be forced to compete for them by offering full-time tenure-track positions. When poverty-wage gig work becomes common in a field, even if the qualifications demanded of workers are very high, it is a sign that there is an oversupply of people with those qualifications.

Before you go to college for the sake of a future career, therefore, check out *recent* resources regarding the average earnings and unemployment rates for people in your envisioned degree program. The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reports that in 2018, unemployment rates for 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree holders were low, but were above average in fields including computer and information science and English, and probably for general liberal arts and interdisciplinary majors. By contrast, unemployment was lowest for education, nursing, and electrical engineering majors. Lots of people are needed who have certifications in the former two fields, and the last is challenging and "boring" enough not to attract more students than can be employed.

While nursing and especially electrical engineering graduates received above-average salaries, though (as did computer science graduates), education majors were, unsurprisingly to any teacher, among the lowest-paid. But in an expected difficult future, students might value the hope of a high salary less than the relative certainty of getting work that will provide basic support. (If the political pendulum swings, wealthy finance graduates might find that prospering in hard times, while contributing little or nothing of value to the real economy, makes them quite unpopular.) Note that NCES did not analyze *underemployment* in this report; it's possible that salaries of some of the lowest-paid majors, such as liberal arts and humanities, social work, fine arts, and English, reflect the fact that

many graduates in those fields couldn't find jobs that used their education and were working at Starbuck's.

Many Americans may think universal college education is essential to educated citizenship. Much information they consider to be important for an informed citizen to know is not taught in many high schools, because parents, or the loudest and most aggressive parents, do not want their kids learning that information. Indeed, it is a shame that so many high schools don't teach uncensored history or biology. However, if a young person reaches adulthood not wanting to hear about those things, then is forced to take a history or biology class in college, they're more likely to be a pest to others than to learn much.

If you do want to learn more about those subjects than your high school gave you, there are plenty of good books available from bookstores that can convey the basic information much more cheaply. Same for philosophy, literature, art, etc.; anyone who just wants to learn a little about these subjects can get books out of the library and find helpful discussions free on the internet. If you *don't* really want to learn about philosophy and literature, paying for the privilege of being forced to do so won't necessarily improve your mind much.

So, there are only a few rational reasons to go to college: (1) To gain knowledge and skills that you'll need for a specific career you intend to pursue (e.g., to become a conservation biologist, you must study biology). (2) To gain *credentials* that you'll need for a specific career you intend to pursue (e.g., you might be able to teach kindergarten well enough without a degree in education, but you won't be given the chance). (3) Because you truly want to pursue the life of the mind, devoting yourself to the study of the liberal arts and humanities no matter what sacrifices it may require. Anything else is either an economic gamble with increasingly poor odds; a costly and inefficient means of gaining general knowledge; or a possibly futile random attempt to gain, preserve, or display class status.

Preserving or gaining class status, in the sense of sufficient income to live securely, is not an unreasonable motivation at all. You should place great weight on being able to support yourself, and your family if you have one, for the rest of your life. However, it's not

true that any four-year degree will get you either surer or better-paid employment than any non-bachelor's alternative. First off, be *very* aware that "degrees" from for-profit online "universities" are nearly worthless in the job market, and usually leave the recipient with nothing but wasted years and crushing debt. But more generally, there are non-college skilled careers that can provide as much income as many real four-year degrees, or more.

I received an advanced degree many years ago, and subsequently could almost always say with great confidence that I'd have made more money that year had I gone to plumbing school at age 18. For example, Career Explorer (2018) reported that the average salary for a plumber in Michigan was $67,050, with a range of $32,700 to $83,400. It seems very fair to me that a senior plumber makes more than I do; my job is more interesting and I get a much better class of dirt under my fingernails. But many middle-class people who wouldn't mind their kids' growing up to do a dull, stressful, soul-crushing corporate cubicle job would be upset at the idea they might become plumbers for a 50% greater salary.

Why? If you feel this way, you ought to contemplate that carefully. Do you fear that if your son, or you, were a plumber, people would presume him or you to be ignorant, or stupid, or right-wing? Is that what *you* assume about blue-collar workers? If so, I can lend you my +3 Cricket Bat of Attitude Adjustment to give yourself a whack on the head with. Nothing stops a plumber from marching for Black Lives Matter or reading good books on the weekends, and surely some do. If others make wrong assumptions about them based solely on the fact that they do essential work without which our society would soon fall apart [!], the fault is in the person doing the assuming. Since we don't have enough good white-collar jobs nowadays for all our college graduates, some talented young people would have been better off if they had been encouraged to pursue skilled "working-class" jobs. You will only be smart enough to consider such possibilities, though, if you reject the kind of classism that tells you your primary goal in life should be to have to wear a suit to work.

That's not to say nobody should go to college. Many should. Many millions of people are employed in, or otherwise meaningfully use, the fields of study they pursued in college. The smaller cities and towns I'm recommending that more people should live in have many fewer jobs for educated people, but not none. However, in remarking upon employment options, I'm not going to say anything about the usual four-year university degree programs (except to comment that if your finances are tight, starting off at a community college isn't a terrible thing). If you're a young person who did well in high school, you know more about the current state of academia than I do. You will have had a guidance counselor talk to you about what subjects you were good at, what college majors you might consider, and what jobs they could lead to. College is so often perceived as the only path to success, though, that your guidance counselor may have unwittingly failed to cover other options. Those are what I want to talk about here.

Good working-class jobs

These days most people without credentials or specific skills are restricted to low-paid service jobs—flipping burgers, stocking shelves, cleaning houses or making up hotel rooms—or even more exploitative digital-age equivalents like Amazon warehouse work or Uber driving. Corporate employers structure these jobs to pay you just barely enough to keep you coming back, not enough to support a family or prepare for a better job, and when the company is pinched, they'll toss you out without a second thought. Do whatever you possibly can to avoid lifetime dependency on these jobs. If you are stuck with them for now, working for humans rather than a corporation is likely a better option.

Manufacturing, where it still exists, is preferable because it usually provides a living wage and sometimes a transferrable skill set, though with union membership low, more employers require abusive hours and lowered wages. These jobs almost always leave you at the mercy of corporate employers that might pick up and move to Mexico. Americans' preference for cheap foreign-made goods could well change in future, as intercontinental supply chains

become more costly and less reliable. The remnants of America's manufacturing industry deserve support so they can make it through the transition period. However, if you support it with your labor you should keep in the back of your mind that you might be betrayed by your employer, as many small manufacturing towns have been, and try to prepare to do something else if necesssary.

A good way to identify some kinds of training that lead to jobs is to peruse the catalogs of community colleges. These colleges mostly cater to working-class people, often returning students, whose reason for taking classes is specific: they want to compete for jobs better than minimum wage burger-flipping. Community colleges therefore strive to provide training that will help to prepare their students for local job opportunities. Some of those opportunities do not provide a living wage, but for some people can provide a stepping stone to a better career; others provide very good wages. Additionally, they have two-year associate programs for those who plan to transfer to four-year state college programs in common subjects. For average students who are not striving to be Masters of the Universe or progress to an elite graduate school, but just to get a useful degree from a state college, one of these programs can be quite money-saving.

Check out the programs offered by your local community college, or those in towns you're considering moving to. If the college is reasonably good-sized, there must be something in those lists of potential fields that you would be good at. Consider them with an eye to things that people need and that are hard to outsource.

Agriculture, horticulture, and forestry, where it exists, are truly essential fields if anything is. Under corporate-capitalist practices these industries contribute greatly to environmental damage, but they can be done sustainably, and it is absolutely necessary that they be done to some extent (every society must have food, clothing, fuel, building materials). Unfortunately, the relative income of most agricultural workers is not at all in accordance with their importance to society. Not only are agricultural *laborers* poorly paid and forced to endure health-wrecking working conditions, but most land-owning farmers would barely break even without having large acreages and getting per-acre federal subsidies for commodity crops. There is a

great need for more small farmers and foresters who find ways of making a sustainable and ethical living outside that system. Examples are successful Community-Supported Agriculture projects and Joel Salatin's soil-building, mostly humane, and profitable methods of meat production (e.g., Salatin 1996, 1998, and others).

As a corollary, once food, fiber, etc. are grown, they must be processed. Big business has worked hard to make that a centralized and then globalized endeavor. However, taking food as the most important example, local butchers, bakers, brewers, independent small businesses making processed foods, etc., still exist. We are not about to revert to a culture where every family does all that stuff at home. We've been willing to tolerate the negative health effects of industrial food because it was cheap, but if its price climbs too far or its delivery becomes too unreliable, those local businesses could become much more popular. If you like the idea of developing such skills, you might be able to get training or pick it up by working at a small business.

One very large group of programs at the large community college in my hometown consists of the traditionally blue-collar-male jobs dealing with mechanical things: building, installing, maintaining, or repairing everything from cars or tractors to houses to their plumbing, wiring, HVAC, or cabinetry. Most of these are important tasks that people value and that are often impossible to outsource. For example, as I write this, there has been a shortage of new cars because of supply chain disruptions, making both new and old cars more expensive. Such problems are likely to recur in future. This will encourage people to keep old cars for longer—which they should have been doing anyway—so the need for competent auto maintenance and repair will increase. Likewise, demand recently shot up for furniture repair and re-upholstering, and for workers in that field, because shipping issues were preventing Americans from just throwing away their tatty old furniture and buying new (Grabar 2021). Providing energy-conserving or green-energy technologies (home insulation, solar or geothermal, etc.) will be a virtually guaranteed growth industry.

A very attractive feature of many of these jobs is that they can be done by small businesses or by independent businesspeople, who get to keep the products of their labor. You don't have to work for a big corporation that hires by algorithm to work as a plumber, mechanic, or cabinet-maker, and you can do it in almost any small town. Women are still a small minority in most of these professions, and sometimes face discrimination or harassment, but you shouldn't let that stop you if that's where your talents and interests lie. If you have adequate stamina and grip strength to do the physical labor required (and that varies greatly depending upon specialty), such skilled jobs might well provide you a better and more secure livelihood than many four-year college degrees.

Another large group of potential careers is in the area of health care, with students being prepared for jobs including nursing assistancy, entry-level nursing, EMT, massage therapist, dental hygienist, and various specialized "assistant" or "technician" roles, including that of veterinary technician. Some of these jobs are reasonably well-paid; a nurse who continues to advance in education and rank can end up with a very good salary indeed. The job of nursing assistant does not pay a living wage, but the program that permits people to take the CNA test (in my home state) only requires one semester and six credit hours, providing a start for those who can't afford more training. With current health care staffing shortages, some employers are offering staff perks including financial assistance for continuing education.

As of this writing, health care labor shortages have resulted from workers being burned out by exhaustion from the pandemic or forced out either by abuse from conspiracy theorists, on the one hand, or one-size-fits-all vaccine mandates on the other. Health care sounds like a rotten job at the moment. However, when the craziness of the pandemic is over, I suspect that most of the public will go back to just wanting someone to take care of them when they are sick or injured. Licensing of health care workers is state-by-state, although there are some interstate compacts, so if you got your training before you moved you'd have to jump through some hoops to be recertified, but health care workers can find jobs almost anywhere.

You won't find this at a community college, but training in a variety of complementary fields (e.g., acupuncture, herbalism) could be marketable if you'll live in a state where their practice will not be legally suppressed to prop up doctors or hospital corporations. The medical industry never did a very good job of dealing with many chronic diseases or commonplace discomforts, and is now pricing itself out of the market for many people, making less expensive complementary care a viable option. Midwives are likely to be in demand in future (provided the right wing doesn't ban their services), as are doulas, who provide support rather than medical assistance. Even some OBs are acknowledging that making culturally sensitive midwife care the norm could do a great deal to reduce the health disparities and outright abuses faced particularly by non-white pregnant and birthing Americans (Farrington 2021).

Law enforcement and firefighting are also essential jobs and hard to outsource, but very challenging, difficult work and sometimes (though less often than warrior-cop training will tell you) life-threatening. Good people in these jobs should be well compensated, and should expect to be. Jobs in extractive industries (mining, shale oil, etc.), are a significant source of employment only in specific regions. Those jobs are also hard, often dangerous, but well paid. However, they are subject to boom-and-bust cycles driven by things like the fracking investment bubble and to constant corporate efforts to replace human workers with heavy machinery. There will also be inevitable decline in employment because, aside from the fact that those industries are destroying the environment, supplies of economically extractable resources are declining. It will simply not be possible to keep fracking at the same rate forever. Work these jobs if you like, but use the good pay to prepare yourself to do something else in your old age.

There will surely be continuing demand for the electronics, computing, networking, and white-collar business fields (accounting, business assistancy, communications, marketing), although some are easier than others to outsource. Computer and device repair will remain a popular business as it becomes harder for people to buy new gadgets frequently. Every business must pay bills and keep books,

but computerization and contracting services to specialized corporations allow local businesses to reduce the number of humans they employ locally to do accounting tasks. It would be wise to check out job ads from your town of interest to see how many jobs in these fields really exist. If what you are really good at is writing or speaking, certainly pursue communications-related work, but be aware that many of these jobs can be done remotely. If the potential hiring pool for a writing job is not just the writers in your town but every writer with an email address, the competition is huge and some will be desperate enough to work for peanuts, driving wages down.

Uncle Sam wants you!

There's another potential source of job training if you cannot pay for it yourself and you are still young and in good health: Join the military. I could never have done this (I'd have literally died from all the running in boot camp, to say nothing of my severe allergy to authority), but if you think you can hack it, it could be a very good option.

Not everyone in the military is in a job involving violence: you could get paid to be trained as a medic, helicopter repairperson, firefighter, truck driver, or data analyst, skills that would be useful later in civilian work. Many employers like hiring veterans, whether for emotional reasons or because they know those people have acquired the discipline to get up in the morning, get to work, and function as part of a team. Also, as a veteran you would be eligible for (at present) 36 months of GI Bill financial assistance to help you pay for college, vocational, or technical training or apprenticeship.

Or, you could get shipped somewhere to fight America's next imperial war for oil, then get stop-lossed and kept there until you get blown up. It's not a risk-free option by any means, especially if the current presidential administration is highly militaristic or less than two years from losing power.

Note that for most interesting jobs, the Army has special qualifications, e.g., refusing people who have any convictions other than for minor traffic offenses, have ever had drug or alcohol problems, ever used any drug at all, ever used marijuana

"experimentally" after age 18, or ever served in the Peace Corps. There are also minimum requirements for strength, standardized test scores, etc. I'd never suggest *lying* to the government even if their expectations of perfect bodily purity from childhood are ridiculous ... but if you would, be aware that for a job with a security clearance, you would be investigated. If you want a good job in the military, ideally you should start aiming for that goal from early adolescence, getting in shape and making sure that you keep a clean record and never let anyone post a photo on social media of you smoking a joint that's perfectly legal in your state. If it's several years too late for that, you can still investigate your options, but they will be narrower (and once you've enlisted, the military does *not* have to give you, or even consider you for, the cool job that the recruiting sergeant said you'd be perfect for).

Just as many white-collar workers' ignorance about blue-collar work and vice-versa is a problem for our society, the fact that in many communities very few Americans serve in the military, so that some people may not personally know anyone who has served, is a problem. This is *not* to give any sympathy to the attitude of some right-wing veterans in politics who suggest that anyone who hasn't killed a foreigner or two isn't fit for leadership, which, among other things, conveniently excludes almost all women. However, some people ("chickenhawks") find it easier to support wars of choice when they don't really understand what they entail, or have any loved ones who might be killed in them. As we face the decline of America's empire, which some will propose to postpone with ever-increasing military violence, things might go better if every community has some skin in the game.

Also, if this country continues to approach the precipice of a civil war, it might save millions of lives for a more diverse group of people to have served. At the moment soldiers, especially white soldiers, disproportionately come from a few specific geographic areas, and a few who are racist extremists go back home to pass on the skills they learned to militias whose fantasy is someday to kill, subjugate, or ethnically cleanse all the rest of us. That is not great news for the rest of us. Every person in the potential "enemy" regions,

cities, or ethnic groups who gets military training, then keeps effective weapons in civilian life, makes civil war or "insurrections" seeking to massacre civilians more costly to the aggressors, therefore less likely.

I am, in fact, sympathetic to the idea that there should be some form of universal service, with civilian alternatives to military service for pacifists and people too small, weak, or unhealthy to get through boot camp. Every youth who wasn't excluded for sound reasons would spend two years in uniform, be taught some useful skills, develop some aspects of discipline, and be forced to work as a team with other Americans from different backgrounds. There is zero chance that this will happen under present political circumstances, of course, but perhaps one or more of our successor nations will consider it. In the meantime, if you are young and fit and have an adequately clean record, especially if you can't otherwise afford college or job training, you might consider voluntarily taking this up as a two-year self-improvement opportunity.

The domestic economy and its discontents

Also, don't neglect another important potential source of financial security for a family: the domestic economy. For the vast majority of human history, both men and women foraged in natural landscapes or worked in their own homes and fields, with assistance from children more than a few years old. They mostly subsisted on their own produce; they traded some surplus products, but earning and spending cash or the equivalent was not a major part of life. There were gender divisions in labor, the rational ones largely being based on what kinds of labor could not readily be done while heavily pregnant or supervising a nursing two-year-old, but it was always understood that the labor of both men and women was necessary to family survival. In agricultural communities, women's cooking, spinning, brewing, and chicken-keeping was recognized to be "work" just as was men's plowing and harvesting.

Only after the industrial revolution, when an increasing number of people began to work for cash pay, was a profound mental divide created between "men's work"—which was to be done for cash,

which was then to be spent to purchase the necessities of life from capitalists—and "women's work"—normatively at home, not earning cash, and therefore treated as less important or even as not really work at all (e.g., Flanders 2014). For much of that period, many women actually did work outside the home, but for a time in the late industrial era, it became possible for many families to survive on just one income.

As capitalist pressure to buy more and more processed foods, labor-saving devices, and other manufactured goods increased, women's unpaid work at home became more of the extreme-cleaning variety, to the point of daily dusting. This work was regarded with even more contempt because it was not "productive," adding nothing to the household's wealth, in contrast to the man's labor. The husband became The Breadwinner, whereas the wife no longer even got credit for being the bread-baker. Women were labeled as inherently inferior by virtue of the inferior labors and educational opportunities that had been assigned to them, and in the mid-twentieth century, often put on addictive drugs such as benzos if they weren't happy shut up alone vacuuming all day. Nowadays, in most American communities, extreme supervision and monitoring of school-age children, also unproductive, has been added to women's tasks.

Thus, we now have a situation where women who keep house, even very skillfully with exceptional domestic productivity, are viewed condescendingly as "just a housewife," while men who do so are viewed as unmanly leeches. It is considered evidence of superior ability or value as a person to work for money, which usually does not mean running an independent business but toiling for a company or richer individuals. However, if a full-time homemaker is able to develop certain productive skills, he (let's use this pronoun for the moment, to avoid giving the "shove the women back into the kitchen" vibe) may be able to contribute as much to a household as he would by working a low-paying job. For example, suppose that a couple's food costs can be reduced from $30 a day to $10 a day if the homemaker does an extra two hours of labor making food and coffee instead of purchasing prepared products or eating out. That's

equivalent to earning $10 an hour for that labor—plus it's tax-free and he doesn't have to spend money and time commuting to get it. And, if much less processed food consumption is the result, the couple may someday save quite a bit more money on medical costs.

The situation is even more extreme when paid child care is needed because one's child or children either are too young to be left alone or could be seized by the state if they were. Child Care Aware of America (2018) reported that in 2017, depending upon how averages are calculated, legal care for preschool-aged children averaged about $9000 to $9600 per year. At those rates, married parents with median income would on average have to pay 11% of their income for care of one child, and single parents 37%. But the actual situation is much worse in many places. In Massachusetts, average care for an infant in a center was $20,415, which would be 70.3% of the median single parent's income ($29,020). In California, it would run $16,542: "only" 60.4% of the median single mother's income, or 18.6% of the median married couple's income. Even family-setting infant care in the most expensive states (which were not always the usual suspects) ran from a third to nearly a half of the median single income and up to 14.6% of the median couple's income.

Child Care Aware provided similarly detailed figures for center and home child care for toddlers and four-year-olds. Costs decline somewhat for care of older children, but still range from steep to utterly crushing for the working classes. (What on earth are they doing in Massachusetts, where costs are insane? Just one more reason to get out of Boston while you can.) Even after-school care for nine months for a school-aged child—the kids who used to get together after school and play outdoors unmonitored until dinnertime, as anyone over 45 will remember—in the least affordable states would gobble a quarter to over 40% of a median single mother's income, 7% to 12% of a couple's income. That's not even touching care during summer vacation.

And all that is the costs for *one* child. If you have two children, child care will be your single biggest budget item in most regions of the U.S., the West being the exception due to its appalling housing costs. Child Care Aware (2018) reported that parents with two

children would on average pay $24,815 per year in the Northeast, $20,960 in the West, $20,605 per year in the Midwest, and $17,193 in the South. The minimum wage in California is $13.00. At $13.00, if you paid no income taxes at all, you'd have to work 31 hours per week, 52 weeks per year, to pay the average cost of child care for two kids in the West. For a Southern state with no minimum wage, someone making the federal minimum wage of $7.25, if they paid no taxes, would have to work 46 hours per week just to pay the average child care costs.

The upshot is: If you have a multiple-adult family and one adult could stay home and provide the necessary care or mandatory supervision of two kids during the day, supposing that was done for 45 hours per week, 52 weeks a year, that adult could count himself as "making"—earning for the family—at least $7.35 to $10.60 per hour *tax-free* based on regional average figures, or even more in the super-expensive states. But in fact his real hourly "wages" would be higher than that, possibly much higher, for at least four reasons. First, the two-child cost averages include families with school-age children, and older children must be supervised much less than 45 workday hours per week (you send them to school most of the year, and maybe even, horrors!, outside to play). Second, if the family actually had two infants or daycare-aged children, the costs of licensed professional care would be much higher than the average, making the hourly wage of avoiding that care higher. Third, even toddlers don't have to be watched with full attention every minute; the homemaker is not precluded by their existence from spending some time cooking, doing laundry, mending, gardening, or other productive activities that could save money, so generate additional "income" for the household. Fourth, the homemaker will not (or should not) work 52 weeks per year because the other adult(s) will hopefully get some vacation time to spend at home with the kids.

Should daycare be cheaper, perhaps the regulations less demanding? Sure—though day care workers are already poorly paid, like many largely-female care workers, so you shouldn't want costs to be cut on their backs. Should the government subsidize daycare, as it does in many social democracies, so that talented women aren't

hindered from participating in the work force? That might be a fine idea, but as long as Americans in a majority of states, or at least their senators, oppose it, don't hold your breath waiting for it to happen. This makes the option of having a full-time homemaker a very appealing one for families of modest means, if at least one parent doesn't have a career they really care about, and it is an option that young couples or, perhaps better, extended families, should consider if appropriate.

There are some caveats, of course. Employers, particularly algorithm-loving corporate employers, are contemptuous of people who have been out of the work force to parent for years, and let's face it, that usually does mean *women* who have been out of the work force. Between being the ones who often breastfeed and being often less well-paid, mothers usually feel pressure to be the ones who stay home. Too much of a dreaded Gap on the Resume, and menial or gig work may be the best a woman can get when she wants or needs to work again. A mother who wants to pursue a career that is well-paid or personally satisfying will properly insist that the family take on the burden of childcare for a few of her poorly paid younger years rather than permanently sacrificing that career. The pleasures of caring for small children are temporary, as they grow up and leave, but the disappointment of sacrificing a path in life that would utilize one's talents, that one had dreamed of and trained for, will last for the rest of one's life.

Even if the homemaker has no such career goals, so that homemaking would be more satisfying than the alternative of a low-wage pink-collar job, it could become a trap if her (or his) spouse is not firmly committed to ensuring an egalitarian relationship. Will the wage-earning spouse recognize the value of the homemaker's labor, even after the kids are grown and gone, or secretly regard her as a mere unproductive consumer who doesn't deserve to be consulted about financial decisions? Will the homemaker and the wage-earner get similar allowances of money to spend as they please, or will only the homemaker be on a tight leash or have every dime spent scrutinized? In heterosexual couples, since men and women have on average somewhat different political preferences, for the spouse with

income to have the only checkbook and sole control over the family's political contributions could actively work against the homemaker's interests.

If worse comes to worst and the couple's marriage fails, as many unfortunately do, will the homemaker be adequately supported as she/he struggles to re-enter the labor force? Or might the wage-earner go to court and seek custody of their children because the ex-homemaker, unable to get a well-paying job, "can't properly provide for them"? For couples who can manage it, it might be wise to draw up a prenuptial or postnuptial agreement regarding what each person's rights and responsibilities are and would be in the event of divorce, whose names will be on checking and savings accounts, etc. Otherwise, enormous trust in one's spouse is necessary, because stepping out of the workforce for long, in a culture where fairly high cash income is virtually required just to live, puts a person in a very vulnerable position.

At this writing, well into the COVID-19 pandemic, much has been made of the Great Resignation whereby low-paid essential workers, who may have been laid off by shutdowns or may have been expected to show up and get exposed to disease for minimum wage, have quit in large numbers, creating labor shortages that force employers to offer higher wages. That all sounds good for the working class. However, it turns out that much of that trend actually represents women being forced out of the workplace as the pandemic made child care unaffordable or unobtainable. As of August 2021, one-third of working mothers had had to reduce or quit their employment, or were planning to do so because of the difficulty of combining work with many extra hours of supervising and educating children (Lee 2021). For women who have grungy jobs and a trustworthy partner with a secure paycheck and a good attitude, this short-term loss could end up rewarding all members of the family. For single mothers left with no source of income, or skilled professionals forced to sacrifice their dreams and goals, it will often be devastating.

The official system of state-licensed commercial child care and public schools wasn't there for those mothers during the pandemic,

and that's adequate proof that it can't be counted upon always to be there for them or others in future. More resilient, less centralized alternatives need to be developed. Elsewhere in this book, I observe that in families capable of living peaceably in multigenerational households, many homemaker roles might better be played by retired grandparents or other relatives—old or young—who cannot or prefer not to continue to do paid labor. Millions of households have such arrangements informally. If they are defined and acknowledged to be an important contribution to the family's economic survival, the people involved might be treated with more respect, and more elderly, retired or unemployed family members might be willing to move into such roles as the cash economy ceases to support them.

Chapter 13: Retirement

If you're getting up there in years, whether or not you think you will want or be able to retire, the question of what you will do in your old age should be a major driver of where you go. The two most essential questions to contemplate are what you would like to have happen, or not happen, to you in your old age, and what social supports, if any, you have that are consistent with those goals.

As long as the medical and nursing-home industry has the power it now has, everyone needs to think about how they want the last years of their life to go. Would you be happy to be prodded into a nursing home by your kids to maximize your physical safety, the first time you have a fall or medical emergency at home? Would you want to go to a nursing home if and when you genuinely couldn't care for yourself? Or would you prefer to stay in your own home until you die, even if that means you die sooner? If you were in a nursing home, would you want aggressive care to help you live there longer (mandatory ER visits whenever you tripped and fell or you seemed sick, tube feeding if you were too demented to swallow, artificial resuscitation when you died), or would you want those who had custody of you to let nature take its course?

Unless your answer is "the most interventions possible, please," you *absolutely must have* a living will *and* an advance directive, following your state's requirements, *and* a document designating a health care power of attorney, one or more people who can be trusted to refuse consent for procedures the first two documents said you didn't want if you are too far gone to refuse them yourself. Sample forms can be found online, but be careful how you fill them out: in states that don't like to ever allow a natural death, you have to sign in front of a notary public and multiple witnesses or they won't count for anything. Even if you're 20 and in great health, you could be

gorked in a car accident tomorrow. Do this as soon as you can. In many states, notary publics (who may be found at local banks or similar institutions) have a fixed fee scale and can only charge $5 or $10; it's not expensive.

If you want to be cared for by others in your old age, do you have any family who might be trusted to do it as long as you aren't too disabled for them to manage? This was until recently the normal practice and is much better than assisted living, if a family can manage it. If, in your early retirement, you lived with one of your children and provided child care and household help, it would then be natural for them to provide you with increasing personal assistance as you became more frail.

This isn't a family counseling book, but be sure everyone involved can get along in a single household before you suggest or enter such an arrangement. For it to work, all of the adults involved must respect the others as adults with autonomy. That you don't want to feel infantilized goes without saying. If your child or the child's spouse ends up feeling that you moved in and started infantilizing them as well as their kids, they'll happily push you into a nursing home when you start getting feeble.

At this point a comment for middle-aged people with kids: If you have an aging parent or set of parents whom you love and get along with and who don't have any pets you can't stand, why not extend an open invitation right now for them to come to live with you? See my comments in the previous chapter about how much money a "non-working" household member who can cook and supervise children could save you, and compare that to how much an extra bedroom to make space for Grandma would cost.

Now back to the retirees: The single most important factor that can make your old age and ultimate death as good as possible is having people nearby who care about you: trusted family or friends. These should include people who are younger than you so that they can be asked to do occasional heavy lifting. If you have children or other younger relatives who love you and whom you trust, choosing a home that is near at least one of them, so they can visit easily and often even if neither you nor they want to live together, should be

among your highest priorities. It is much more important than weather or state tax rates.

In fact, if you have a loving family who all live in a climate red zone, that's one circumstance that could make it seem rational to stay there. But your grandchildren might not have safe or comfortable lives there. Perhaps you can persuade the kids to move somewhere else for their sake, and take you with them?

If you prefer to avoid aggressive medical care and/or to remain independent until you die, consider carefully whether you can trust your children. Do they share your general beliefs? Do they have advance directives, and what do they say? When you tell them about your wishes, do they seem supportive or negative? When they were children, did you never let them play outdoors or go anywhere alone lest they be killed by imagined roaming packs of child molesters? By teaching them that avoiding any possibility of physical harm to "vulnerable" people was the most important priority in life, you may have given them a fearful, risk-averse, controlling temperament that will lead them to coerce you into a nursing home the first time they find out you had a fall at home. You might be better off, if you don't have any notion of expiating karma, to live a few states away from them and see them seldom and on your terms.

Some people have worse problems with their children than values conflicts. The kids may be leeches, often with addiction or mental health issues, who are forty years old and still shaking you down for money every week or two. Maybe they never work or want to, or maybe they have jobs but blow all their money on drugs or gambling. They would just love to be able to move in with feeble old Mom, suck her bank account dry, and steal her stuff to sell. Family dynamics in such cases can be nightmarish. Maybe your kid is like that because of your lousy parenting. Maybe you did a great job and there was nothing you could have done to avoid it; some people are just born predisposed to have mental difficulties. Set the past aside and coldly, rationally assess whether your child(ren) are fundamentally untrustworthy. If they are, unless you *want* to let them ruthlessly exploit you in their old age, move away from them and stay away.

If you don't have kids then, if you want to live independently, you can do that and mind your own business. In certain states, Nevada being the worst recently, you have to watch out for doctors and other authorities who slip the names of physically weak widows with assets to predatory professional "guardians" who go to court to have the people labeled incompetent and dragged away to nursing homes, then sell their belongings and control or steal their money. If you have close friends who can be pre-emptively listed in legal documents as your choices for durable financial power of attorney, health care power of attorney, and conservator if needed, this might help to protect you from that racket. List more than one, if they're as old as you are.

If you want to go into assisted living, those places and, even more, nursing homes cost a fortune. Cost can vary greatly in different states and in urban vs. rural communities, so if you don't have close friends or family driving your decision to stay or move to a particular place, you might want to specifically search for communities with well-reputed, affordable assisted living centers. (Be a little cautious of assisted living centers whose owners also own nearby nursing homes or have nursing home wings onsite. The latter can be ideal for couples who are in different stages of decline, but you want to know that the management is not free to dictate, for example, that because you had a fall they will no longer allow you to use your feet to walk, and because you are now required to use a wheelchair, you can't stay in assisted living and must be transferred to a nursing-home double room, which means you will no longer be allowed to leave the building alone. They make more money when that happens.)

If you can't or don't want to be near family so are choosing a retirement home to suit your own preferences alone, there's good reason to favor a small town. Housing, whether an apartment or house or an assisted living center, is likely to be less expensive, and you are less likely to die in a heat wave assisted by an urban heat island. Very small towns, though, lack important services and public transportation, making residents highly car-dependent, have few recreational or social opportunities, and are sometimes so insular that you'll have trouble making connections.

If you want to live independently, a major factor should be to choose a community and neighborhood where you would not need a car to survive. Aside from the general concern about gas and parts shortages, if you live long enough, your senses and reflexes will someday decline to the point that driving becomes dangerous to yourself and others. If you have kept walking throughout your life (or getting about by wheelchair if you use one), then unless you develop severe health problems, you'll be able to make it a few blocks to a store under your own power long after you can no longer safely drive. (If you never walk anywhere but could, start *now*, before you are very old and frail. Going downhill slower is much easier than trying to climb back up the hill.) Pick a town where public transportation or ride services for seniors are available, and choose a residence within walking distance of the services you'll use most frequently, such as a grocery store. If you will want a lot of medical care, check up on the quality of the local doctors and hospital; you won't want to feel that you have to leave town constantly for your medical appointments.

If your faith is important to you, definitely prioritize finding a community with a suitable congregation. Look also for a community that has activities for seniors, such as classes at the Y or park district. Social ties are important in retirement: they make you happier and healthier and can protect you in difficult times. Form some as soon as possible after you move. Volunteer, join a church or social organization, take a class, do whatever you can to get to know people in your new home.

Moving after you retire is also a great opportunity to downsize. As the economy and nation decline, it will become increasingly uncertain whether retirees will get all the income they have expected to receive, whether from investments or pensions or Social Security. Or you might get the promised income, but find that inflation has greatly reduced its value. Your plan should be to live modestly, spending less on housing than you could afford and socking away the extra. That means less space to clean and maintain, and if your actual or effective income suddenly declines, you won't face a sudden crisis.

If you're young, you may not find it natural to think about retirement. That may be just as well, because there is a good chance that you'll never get to retire, unless perhaps to live with your adult children: either you won't get paid enough to amass an adequate nest egg, or it will be eaten up or made worthless by economic crises and/or hyperinflation. It's possible that before you become eligible for Social Security, the United States will have split into multiple nations. Would the government of the New Confederacy, say, pick up Social Security obligations? *Could* they even if they wanted to? If Social Security does persist into your old age, one way the government might keep it from going bankrupt is to fail to keep up with inflation, so that your monthly check might just about cover a daily can of cat food. If the country is taken over by a right-wing regime, that might be a deliberate policy, to repudiate the obligation without admitting that they are doing so.

The pushback of the age for full eligibility also hits blue-collar workers and minorities hardest. The average life expectancy of a working-class African-American is lower than the Social Security standard retirement age now. Some people pay in for decades and never get to draw a check. It's relatively tolerable for office workers to put in another few years on the job after 65, unless they're among the increasing percentage of the population who are developing early-onset dementia for some reason (that's a whole different sustainability issue). For people who do hard physical work, who get arthritis and repetitive stress injuries from their jobs, at some point in old age it just becomes too difficult to keep doing that work. Seventy will be past that point for many. Preparing yourself to survive in other ways would be a good idea.

Our society shoves old people who still have minds off into nursing homes not only because of their children's controlling and risk-averse mindsets, but because those people are not perceived as having value in the outside world. Compare this to traditional societies that had sufficient resources to support old people. Native American cultures, for example, usually regarded elders with great respect and gave them places of honor. One reason for the difference

is that those elders held skills, knowledge, memories, and wisdom from which young people derived benefit and understood that they did. A person who works a relatively independent job that relies on complex skills, such as a farmer or mechanic, may continue to accumulate knowledge and experience throughout life. Long after their physical strength and labor productivity have declined, younger family members or coworkers can continue to respect these people for their knowledge, learn from them, and ask them for advice about difficult problems. Traditional homemakers, even into the 20th century, could fall into this category; jobs like scratch cooking and preserving food use skill and intelligence.

Most jobs nowadays do not allow people to gain such expertise. Many technical fields are changing at historically unimaginable rates, so that older workers come to be perceived not as repositories of knowledge but as dinosaurs to be pushed out and replaced with young people familiar with the latest tech. If you work a corporate or bureaucratic job until you retire and stop working, whether you managed a robot in a factory or spreadsheets in a cubicle, there is no opportunity in private life to practice this skill or pass it on. Individual creativity is not welcome in service jobs: fast-food employees are trained to cook like robots, and Amazon drivers are expected to work like robots but treated worse. Homemakers in the consumerist model are in the same boat. If you always "made" fried chicken by microwaving food bought frozen or from the deli, young people will see no need to stand at your elbow and learn from you.

If you are young and still have the option to choose a kind of work where you can accumulate skill and respect as you proceed through life (such as those independent skilled labor jobs), you might want to make that a criterion if you can. If you're well into a working life that doesn't fit that description and don't see a possibility of changing careers, one way of bettering your position in old age is to develop an alternate type of expertise. As I suggested earlier, these could be skills, like homemaking, that would encourage younger relatives to want you to live with them in old age. Or they could be some kind of artisanship, or other skills that could bring in some independent income after you leave your corporate job or it leaves

you. If you formed social ties with others in your community having the same interests, you could over time become one of the respected senior members of that group. Even if that didn't directly do anything to feed you, it would support your sense of dignity and emotional health.

So, if your job is not helping you to develop skills that will be usable for a lifetime, you should consider your circumstances, talents and interests to identify skills that you might develop on your own. Almost everyone, men very much included, ought to develop some domestic-economy skills—at least, the art of cooking from scratch cheaply while minimizing labor. Other skills, from woodworking to writing, might be pursued as hobbies during working life. Some such skills are too expensive for working-class people to pursue, or require full-time effort to develop anything like professional quality. Many, though, could, at least at first, be affordably pursued for recreation in one's spare time. Gardening, hunting, and fishing can all be productive hobbies, provided you spend (for example) less on gas, lures, bait, and beer than you would spend to buy the quantity of fish obtained! You could keep track and try to make that an entertaining challenge for yourself. If you have kids or grandkids, sharing a hobby with them would do them and you far more good than watching the "boob toob" with them. (More on that shortly.)

Chapter 14: Real Human Communities

In a moment I will talk about how to embed yourself among the residents of your new community, but first let's think of the community you are leaving behind. If you move away from a place that is likely to face major hardship in the short term, perhaps you will leave behind family or friends who will remain at risk. You may have known these people since childhood; in the best case, your ties with them may be stronger than any new friendships you will ever form. Once you have established yourself somewhere, one of the best things you could do, for yourself and others, is to offer to help selected loved ones to move and get established in the same area.

If your brother or best friend from high school doesn't have enough money to move, and you can trust him not to be a leech or cause trouble for you, you could invite him to stay in your guest room or crash on your couch until he gets a job. He could then be part of your local social network for the rest of your life, each of you able to give the other a hand when it's needed. Or if he's doing very well where he is and doesn't want to move, then if someday things go badly for him, you can step in and offer him that couch.

Unfortunately, you do need to be a bit selective, because some of our loved ones *can't* be trusted. If you know that your brother or friend currently has serious drug or drinking problems, for example, the likelihood that he'll ever get off your couch and stand on his own feet is low. You could be stuck with him for a long time, or have an unpleasant scene trying to get rid of him, and at worst, he could attract the attention of law enforcement and get *your* door kicked in at 3 AM. Is your family member chronically dishonest, a mooch or freeloader? She probably will never change unless circumstances absolutely force her to buckle down and take responsibility. You might let her move in if her house burns down, but otherwise, be glad

of the distance between you and keep it that way; your enabling her won't help either of you.

In the Great Migration of African-Americans from the apartheid South to the North in the 1930s to 1960s, sequential migration was the rule. The first person from an extended family or community who moved to Chicago or Detroit struggled mightily to secure basic housing. Once they were well established, they could invite relatives to join them one or two at a time, and give those people a roof over their heads while they got settled and found work. Neighbors would hear about their improved lives and decide to move to the same place. They then had local social networks of people with a shared history who would help out in times of need, watching each others' kids and so forth. If the 21st-century outmigration from the Southwest and other unsustainable places can be handled similarly, it will spare a lot of suffering.

A caveat, though: With Northern housing also segregated, most of the people in the Great Migration went to a small number of fairly large cities, where they knew from the experience of earlier migrants from their community that homes and jobs would be available. Whole communities' worth of migrants might mostly go to the same city: from Palestine, Texas to Syracuse, from Chickasaw Co., Mississippi to Beloit (Wilkerson 2010). Their children thereby ended up living in a limited number of crowded, unsafe, unhealthy urban centers, which would later be targeted for oppression by white-ruled state governments. This *must* not be repeated as the era of hyper-urbanization winds down. Supplying and maintaining huge cities is going to get harder in future, not easier. Furthermore, too many "Californians" concentrated in one place could well become targets, just as "Okies" were targets in California ninety years ago. People whose group affinities might make them targets in a brewing civil war should be careful not to cluster in ways that make them easy to find and attack.

Thus, the importance of individuals' and families' selecting their new destinations based on their differing values, needs, abilities, interests, and even whimsy. If the first wave of migrants go to several hundred different cities and towns rather than a relative handful of

metropolises, then family or friends follow them, that second wave can be better distributed than the people who participated in the original Great Migration. By the time a third wave is ready to depart, the first migrants will be more familiar with their region, some perhaps making another move into a smaller community nearby. They will be able to suggest to newcomers which nearby towns are good or bad choices, so that migrating populations can be still more broadly dispersed.

It is even more important, though, that you make deliberate efforts to form ties with people in your new community. If you choose to move to a small town, it is *essential*. By now at least a thousand commentators must have bemoaned the decline of community in American society. We are less likely than our parents to stay in our hometown, to socialize with our neighbors or even know their names, to belong to a church or civic or fraternal organization or be active in a political party, even to get together with our own immediate families. Occasionally we're found "bowling alone" (Putnam 2000), but more often we're sitting indoors, staring at screens. (I will argue shortly that the addictiveness of those screens is a major factor in the decline of our society.)

Complaints about loss of community are often presumed to derive from a politically conservative viewpoint that yearns for "the good old days" during which, for the supposed good of the collective, individuals from many subgroups of society were subordinated or invisible. In our individualism-obsessed culture, saying that we should devote more time and effort to being a part of our community is heard as saying we should sacrifice our own interests for those of people who don't even like or value us. But liberals ought to be at least equally worried about the decline of community. People who suffer from anomie, feeling isolated from and powerless within their communities, are more likely to adopt political extremist viewpoints, especially authoritarian, xenophobic or conspiracist views (e.g., Abalakina-Paap et al. 1999, Ionescu et al. 2021). Sound familiar? Humans are social animals who *need* social connections, and if real

connections are lacking, the false connections supplied by fascist movements can seem more appealing.

Community organizations, such as churches, fraternal organizations, and civic groups, also used to play an important role in protecting members and their families during hard times. Nowadays, there is usually enough social safety net in America to keep people from actually starving to death if they lose their jobs, get sick or injured, or are widowed. It wasn't always that way, and we can't be confident that it will always be that way in future. Someday the official government support systems might be falling apart, whether by deliberate design or by being overwhelmed by disasters, and local organizations may step up to fill the gap for their members. But you will have to have been an active participant before your time of need in order to expect help.

Small-town living practically forces prosocial behavior because if you don't have any involvement with the community you're in, people *will* notice and think ill of you. At the very best, if you don't really care about anyone there, none of them will care about you, so if you need help, nobody will be there for you. You need to shop at local stores whenever possible, attend important local events, find someplace to volunteer or an organization to join, try to make friends. Whether the town is big or small, it's important to patronize local agriculture, such as the farmers' market, as much as you can. Get one of those local cookbooks like church women's groups put out and learn to cook and enjoy regional products. Not only will this help you fit in at potlucks, but if the supply of veggies from California should be disrupted, you'll know what to do with the food that's locally available.

In larger urban areas, it is sometimes harder to arrange to do things that get you out of the house and dealing with others, and it's easier to refrain from doing them. You don't know if your immediate neighbors are participating in the community, and they won't know if you do. You can just sit inside and watch TV or YouTube, buy everything you need online, and remain totally isolated. But it's bad for you, physically and emotionally, and it leaves you without real human connections to draw upon in time of need. It will require

effort, even struggle and painful self-discipline, at first, but wherever you go, find ways to make yourself a part of the community. You'll be glad you did in the long run.

The opiate of the masses

I want to take this opportunity to point out one of the major unrecognized factors in the impending collapse of our civilization, namely television, followed by its monstrous offspring, the Internet. If I could get everyone to read just one book about our society's predicament, it would not be the latest IPCC report, or the *Limits to Growth* update, or *The Collapse of Complex Societies*. It would be a profound book written by a former ad executive, the unfortunately named Jerry Mander (1978), called *Four Arguments for the* Elimination *of Television*. Obviously, his campaign did not succeed, but the issues he raised are still very real, and the addition of the Internet and social media to television has worsened the situation by another order of magnitude. I cannot do justice to his careful, complex arguments in a few paragraphs, so you should read the book, but a brief summary is as follows.

First, Mander explores the *mediation of experience* at length. People living in natural environments constantly observe occurrences, cause-and-effect relationships, and consequences that are out of their control. They trust their observations of the world because they know that things they have seen are real, and are ignored at their peril. Modern people live in artificial environments shielded from or deprived of much of that experience. Television makes the problem worse because it can not only present an artificially limited reality, but show images of alleged realities, relationships, and consequences that don't really exist. People easily come to think that they do not know what is real and what isn't, so they must wait for official Experts to tell them what to believe. The feeling that reality is arbitrary, and that you cannot know what to believe so have to passively wait for others to tell you, supports the development of autocracy.

Second, he describes the *colonization* of experience. Inevitably, because of the cost of television infrastructure, it became dominated by large corporations that make their profits through advertising on a

scale never before seen. They tailor its content, the "realities" presented, to create new "needs" and pressure you to buy more. You are made to believe that you are in physical or social danger, deprived, or defective without the product being pushed. "Any collective act ... is less productive to the wider system in the end than everyone functioning separately in nuclear family units," Mander explains. "Isolation maximizes production. Human beings who are satisfied with natural experience ... are not as productive as the not-so-satisfied." By "productive" in this case he means: producing revenue for the corporations. If you make a good salary yet have big credit card bills that aren't due to unavoidable medical debt, there's a good chance you've been programmed like a consumer-robot by electronic media.

Third, there are potential *physical effects* of television, aside from the obesity-inducing effect of sitting in the La-Z-Boy for several hours a day. Staring at those screens has neurological effects that make the brain more passive, and you more vulnerable to manipulation. Beaming those images as light right through your eyes into your brain might not be good for your brain. (There is increasing concern about the effects of the heavily blue light spectrum produced by modern devices.) Scientific evidence on that point may not be conclusive, but it never *could* be so long as television is so central to our culture, and so profitable to our corporate elites, that it would be politically unthinkable for funding agencies to support research intended to provide stronger proof of its harms.

Fourth, television has *inherent biases*. Because of the limitations of the medium, Mander explains, TV does not easily convey complexity, warm or positive emotions, subtle understandings of other cultures, experiences of nature. Even when it tries to do a good job at those things, it can't. It is good at conveying broad, simple things like anger and violence, which is why so much of our programming is sports or oversimplified news and dramas featuring violence and trauma that are designed to make us fearful and often angry. What it's best at doing—again, inevitably, as a consequence of the format—is selling commercial products. Often those are products

that are wrecking the environment now, and that we may not be able to count on getting in the future.

Moreover, to keep us watching the programs, which are naturally boring compared with watching the real world, long enough to get to the commercials, TV producers throw in lots of "technical events." These are sudden changes in what is perceived, such as changes of scene, camera angle, distance, focus, or musical cues, which don't happen in real life, so they startle the brain into paying closer attention. Mander's Technical Event Test suggests counting the number per minute to find out how often your brain's chain is being yanked. In programs, at that time, he estimated an average eight or ten per minute; in commercials, ten or fifteen per thirty seconds. He didn't focus on the issue of how much so-called "attention deficit disorder" in children was simply the perfectly normal and natural result of spending thousands of hours watching programs that train one's attention to expect an artificial boost every six seconds. The answer, though, is almost certainly: a lot.

Recall that Barbara Walter (2022), in *How Civil Wars Start*, placed heavy blame on social media for contributing to recent civil wars and outright genocides, such as that against Rohingya people in Myanmar. You may note that all of Mander's objections to television apply to the Internet, often to an even greater degree: The internet is full of nonsense information and convincing videos that are not just distorted but outright faked; in its total disconnection from reality, gullible viewers are encouraged to adopt paranoid delusions, eating disorders, and dangerous, idiotic tricks like the Tide pod challenge. Social media algorithms deliberately steer users towards more extreme, more upsetting "content," whether it is true or false, because being more upset causes us to read or watch more, which generates more ad revenue (and more personal data on *us* that can be sold to other corporations). Content that is nuanced or subtle, that reflects and promotes kind emotions, that refuses to divide the world into Us and Them, is less successful and, receiving fewer "likes," is systematically downgraded. And of course, the internet encourages us to spend even more hours staring into the blue light.

Devoting one's leisure time to staring at screens is incompatible with a flourishing culture and participatory democracy, even if those screens were not teaching us to treat one another as enemies, which they certainly *are*. After you get off work, do you want to go to a city council or school board or party meeting? Probably not, if it conflicts with "your favorite programs." Do you want to play ball or garden or volunteer with your kids on the weekend? Not if your weekends consist of a dawn-to-dusk string of sports broadcasts. And then there are the jobless young men who sit in their mothers' basements watching various extremists' recruitment videos, many of whom could soon have jobs if they spent the same amount of time developing technical or social skills. Playing video games—the best of which really are fun and engrossing, I admit—for twelve hours straight is a bit less passive, but still means not doing something with that time in the real world, which could result in real personal growth and more substantive and lasting satisfaction.

Many Americans feel that they don't have time or energy, after work and commuting and unavoidable housework, to pursue a hobby or volunteer work, or exercise or continuing education, or even to play with their kids or cook from scratch. Some of us really don't. But I promise that if you watch TV, or YouTube, TikTok, your Facebook feed (or "Meta"—whatever you say, Zuck), or any other screen, for more than ten hours a week, you *do* have enough time to take up a new activity and become good at it—if you cut out the screen-staring, or cut it way back. You may think that TV is preferable because you are exhausted and stressed after work, and TV helps you to relax. It doesn't, really; it helps people to feel passive and vegetative, but not actually refreshed. If your work is physical, a leisure activity that is physically easy but mentally stimulating would do you much more good; if your work mostly requires mental focus, a leisure activity that gets you using your hands or body would do you more good.

So, I'd suggest detoxing from TV, streaming video, social media, and all similar stuff for a while and see how you like your life without it. You might go cold turkey, or if you have family members who would go berserk, you could propose a phased withdrawal. If at

first you feel stressed and bored without it, find other things to fill your time and see how you feel when you've adjusted.

If you're in a situation where your kids, by virtue of youth or local paranoia, can't play outside alone and you have been using the boob tube for several hours a day to keep them pacified, you obviously had better not deprive them of the tube except as you simultaneously help them develop other pleasurable activities to occupy their time. Encourage playing with *non-electronic* toys and puzzles, reading whatever *they* choose from the library (and don't judge!), helping with cooking and other housework, or doing inexpensive crafts, as examples of activities that don't involve screen-staring. If they're old enough, encourage them to join the Boy Scouts or 4-H, if that's available in your area, and start doing projects of their choice. At first they may find these things boring compared to electronic stimulation, but keep trying to reduce the percentage of their time spent screen-staring. See how much their attention span improves as you wean them off the screens. They'll be much better off for it in the long run.

If your kids aren't already living and posting their entire existence on social media, strongly discourage them from starting in future; if they are, try to wean them off. Make sure they know how ridiculous the practice is, that internet "followers" don't really know or care about them, and that corporations are recording every mouse-click to use against them in future. They will only believe you, of course, if they don't see *you* checking your social media ten times a day and bragging about your upvotes. Set a good example.

If you decide to move to a smaller, safer or more libertarian community where you'll feel more able to let the kids play outside, perhaps that could give you the opportunity to cut off the tube altogether. You could explain that you'll be moving and not bringing the TV with you, because there will be so many fun, exciting things to do in the new home that it won't get enough use to be worth the space. Of course, you still want to be able to get urgent local news and weather reports. You can usually do that with a radio, or if you have a computer, you can buy a $70 gizmo to stick in the USB port that allows it to pick up digital TV signals. Do not, however, subscribe to any internet-TV services.

Or if you really want to keep your TV so you can watch movies or avoid looking like weirdos to your addicted neighbors, stick it someplace out of the way where you can turn chairs towards it on the occasions when you want to watch a specific program. Don't set it up as the focus of your living room with all seating facing it, like the altar at the front of a church. That sends the message that it, not your family members or guests, should be the regular focus of your attention. The less TV, online "influencers," and similar stuff you watch, I promise you, the more contentedly you will find yourself living, and the more easily you will adopt a frugal, lower-carbon way of life.

For urbanites moving to small towns

Finally, I hope you'll forgive me for some remarks on Right Attitude in your new home, especially if that home is a small conservative town and you are a Blue urbanite. For some this will be very obvious and you may think I'm being condescending, but please believe me that some other people need advice. Lifelong city residents can be just as parochial as rural villagers in their own way. Everyone they know is from the city; they have never met a farmer. (Many urban children actually do not know where tomatoes or potatoes *come from.*) Better-educated urbanites often have friends and colleagues who are ethnically diverse, but all similarly well-educated; they may never socialize with anyone who isn't, or have more than a brief conversation with them at the checkout counter or the tire shop. How can they know what behavior is appropriate in a small blue-collar town? Just like a rube going to the big city and unwittingly shaming himself by bristling or sneering at its diversity, city folk in small towns can look like arrogant fools without realizing it. If you get that reputation in your first months, it could take many years to shake it. At worst, if the rural vs. urban cold war turns hot, that could put you in real danger.

Adopt small-town manners the instant you get there. Residents of nicer small towns tend to be, or at least act, friendlier and less rushed. They say good morning when they pass people on the sidewalk or join a line at the post office, even if they don't know each other, or wave when they drive by a neighbor walking his dog. They drive

slowly on narrow residential streets because they know children will often be riding bikes in them or playing nearby. They may tap the car horn to say hello to someone (this drives me nuts), but will be slow to lean on it to punish the driver ahead of them who doesn't move fast enough when the town's stoplight turns green. They are also less likely to go screeching through that light after it's turned red, partly because the local cops will write tickets for that. If you display the rushy-rushy big city attitude, impatient and avoiding unnecessary speech or eye contact with strangers, you will get a reputation as an unfriendly jerk.

A minor cultural point: Unless you're arriving to take a professional job, wear practical clothing if you can. Avoid a style that's too fancy or overtly countercultural, avant-garde, or "liberal." Don't wear T-shirts advertising liberal causes. Observe how residents dress; imitating how they dress for winter will be particularly important to your happiness in the locality. When you need to buy clothing, shop locally as much as possible. That will both build your social connections and help you to dress for the weather. For women, if fancy makeup, short skirts, and spike heels are your current style and you see that women in your new home don't share it, you had better cut back or you'll look snooty and high-maintenance at best. Contrarily, if local styles favor makeup and fancy hairdos, some women (like me) may reasonably refuse to conform; the jobs you'll be shut out of probably aren't worth having anyway.

I noted before that if you move from a small town to a big city, thanks to urban snobbery, you don't have to explain yourself. If you move in the other direction, especially dramatically (which is seldom advisable), people will wonder why you're there. *They* may think that their home is better, but they don't expect *you* to think so. They've seen too many TV shows that make it clear what too many urban coastal residents think of Flyover. Have an explanation ready that relies on positive things about the locale. For example, "I want to raise my kids where they can play outdoors and people are friendly." Not "I wanted to get away from the coming wildfires," which suggests that you're just using their town as a convenient host for your personal semi-rural doomstead. At the moment, "I didn't want

to be forced to get a COVID booster every six months for the rest of my life just to work" would be a satisfactory explanation in many places; this may not be an issue forever, though. If you grew up in one state but are currently living in another, you may be strategic about which one you emphasize (try to feature your connection to the more conservative state, or whichever one isn't California).

Small-town residents have more conservative understanding of social and political issues than most people in coastal big cities. Culture changes more slowly in small towns, so even kindly, politically moderate people cannot be expected to have adopted the most recent "correct" language and behavioral fashions on urban college campuses. Your expectations should be adjusted accordingly. For example, working-class ruralites do not tell everyone they meet what their pronouns are, and many won't be persuaded to refer to you as "they," certainly not as "xe" or "ey." If you go around telling people that you're "demisexual nonbinary," most won't know what it means and will scoff when you explain (even if they actually have the relevant characteristics in common with you!). I don't mean that you should be willing to accept bigotry, of course, but if you're a member of an invisible minority of any kind, consider whether you insist on being "out of the closet" with people whom you don't know well, and if so, don't move to a place where you suspect that it would make you a pariah. (In the event of a fascist coup in 2024, many invisible minorities would be well advised to keep their heads down unless and until the Union breaks up or they can get out of it.) Also, do not introduce yourself by telling everyone where you went to college, implying that this is a very important fact about you (and, therefore, that lack of a degree is an important fact about them).

In some small towns, a modest number of residents who are nonwhite, or known to be gay, for example, may be tolerated and even accepted as long as they are not suspected of being *Democrats*. If you're going to be a Blue Tribe member in a mostly Red community, don't go around announcing it, including by means such as arriving in a car coated with liberal bumper stickers. This just invites people who have never met you to start hating you. Let them get to know you as a person before they know you as a political animal.

You will hear people express opinions that you disagree with, or find prejudiced, or know to be false. Do not be hasty to jump in and tell them the truth as you see it. As the saying goes, you have two ears and one mouth for a reason. At least at first, school yourself to behave as a person who "doesn't like to talk about politics or religion," who is happy to be quiet, make noncommittal noises, and listen. If you're asked your opinion, be brief and tactful. This is an extended information-gathering exercise. You will be learning what attitudes, beliefs, and topics of conversation are locally acceptable. Sometimes you learn that a person can hold an ignorant or outright delusional opinion, yet still be, in the context of day-to-day living, kind, well-meaning, and decent. Sometimes you learn that a certain person is a malevolent bigot or militia nut; you then know to politely stay as far away from him as possible.

A corollary is that, while you should seek every opportunity to be active in your new community, you should avoid getting involved in contentious political issues, such as by vocal participation in city council or school board meetings or publicly taking sides in local elections, in your first years of residence. If most locals agree with your view, your voice won't be needed. If they don't, they'll see you as a carpetbagger trying to impose the preferences of people in the big city that you moved there to get away from.

Not all small-town people are holy-rollers by any means, even in the South, but few are open, much less angry, atheists. Expressing dislike of the dominant local religion will make you unpopular. Do not suggest to locals that they're raising their kids wrong, especially if their kids seem less likely to grow up popping psych drugs than big-city kids. Unless the local school is doing something truly atrocious, be very slow to complain; if there is a real problem, longtime residents should be leading the complaints. (You should have checked in advance to see that they're not teaching creationism, if you weren't willing to fill in Bio 101 at home.) If you're a finicky eater, the food at local restaurants may not please you; avoid it if you really can't learn to like it, but don't grouse about it. Be patient if traffic on local routes is slowed by farm equipment during planting or harvest seasons. As a general rule, avoid telling people how much

better anything was done back home, or they will ask why you don't go back there.

Gun ownership, hunting, and fishing are common in small towns across the country and can contribute to people's livelihoods and recreation. If you're a vocal PETA member or anti-gun zealot, stick to city life—or you could take seriously the dictum that your opponents are not evil in their own eyes, and spend some time learning to see the world from their point of view. As I've hinted before in suggesting that liberal youths ought not to avoid military service, adopting some of that culture yourself, i.e., getting a gun and spending some time at the local shooting range learning to use it, might have long-term benefits. It might convince local right-wingers that you're one of the good people. Or it might just make them think it would be easier to leave you in peace when the rule of law breaks down.

Cops and politicians have a lot of power in small towns—not that they don't have power in big cities, of course, but it can be more personal in small towns, because they can know or recognize more people as individuals and have the leisure time to make specific people's lives easy or difficult. (Some towns' governments and police forces are grotesquely corrupt; I have not knowingly recommended such places, but if you are researching potential destinations, take warnings of that nature seriously.) It's always wise to be friendly, patient, and respectful when you encounter local authorities; someday you'll need a permit or something, and they can choose to smooth your path or to throw up roadblocks. Until you know the lay of the land, obey all traffic laws and local ordinances religiously; don't even jaywalk. If you get stopped by a cop anyway, even if you know it's a pretext, I advise you to act friendly, patient, and respectful, answer his questions, and pretend to believe he's just doing his job. This is a tough ask for people like me who are inclined by temperament to assert our legal rights while we still have any left. However, if you act docile and try to get on his good side, he won't decide to harass you for the rest of your life. It's worth tugging your forelock once or twice to avoid that.

If you have school-age children, try to school them in the above behaviors, but *don't* teach them to fear the "other" faction. You certainly want to raise your children to share your basic values (e.g., that all people deserve rights and respect) and not to be afraid to assert those values in their own words. However, it might be better not to teach political slogans, which would be seen as markers of family factional affiliation, to children too young to have learned the value of discretion. Values are essential; tribe is not. Older children, who can understand and participate in politics, may deal with classmates who aggressively promote the dominant faction at school (Burnett 2022). These youths should be mature enough to consider questions such as: when is silence complicity, and when is it just a reasonable choice not to bang your head against a brick wall? They should know not to discuss your beliefs and actions with others, but don't try to control their decisions about whether, when, and how to express their own beliefs or identities.

In conservative communities, many people follow the leaders of their faction in denying the reality of climate change. Someone who has seen enough damage from climate change that they felt forced to migrate may find this frustrating, but there is no profit in arguing with climate deniers; it only places you into their "enemy" category. However, if you happen to be middle-class, do remember that if they have a gas-guzzling pickup and a double-wide, and you have an air-conditioned house full of electronic gizmos and fly somewhere every year or two, your actual carbon footprint might be much larger than theirs. Instead of commenting on the climate costs of other people's consumption, just work to reduce your own and let people see that you are happy with a modest lifestyle.

That seems like a good place to end this little advice book. Wherever we are, wherever we choose to live or move or stay, most of our families at some future point *will* be living what most Americans now think of as a very modest lifestyle, out of necessity. Even if the impending collapse of our political system could be reversed, some combination of a resource crisis and a pollution crisis would still compel us all to tighten our belts. Your goal for the coming decades should not be to gain or keep a middle-class-or-

better lifestyle; it should be to try to ensure that you and your family will have your basic needs met in the long term. For millions of Americans, the best way to do that will be to move, sooner rather than later, to a community that is better placed than their current home to survive the coming economic and environmental crises, and to become a known and useful part of that community. Good luck to you in that endeavor.

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